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Letters from
a Silent Study

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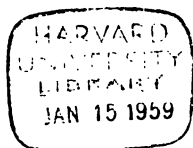
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LETTERS FROM A SILENT STUDY

By JOHN OLIVER HOBBS

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The following series of notes, more or less critical, on life has been given to me. The writer wished to tell the truth—a desire which may be regarded as a legitimate claim to any reader's consideration and indulgence.

On Private Opinions

Letters from a Silent Study

ON PRIVATE OPINIONS

WHEN a man has expressed himself on a given subject, with every sign of warmth, candour, and conviction, it is the custom for some intimate friend to draw him aside, and ask gently : “ But what is your private opinion of all this ? ” The man will gaze into the eyes of his friend, and contradict, by that glance, all he has previously declared. His friend will then feel re-assured, and later, at their leisure, the two will exchange, if they are fond, as much truth as human beings seem able to articulate—even to their dearest, most trusted loves. There

ON PRIVATE OPINIONS

must be some reason for this psychological phenomenon—which is so ordinary that it is seldom observed. The private opinion, moreover, is regarded as a sacred belonging—as sacred as a secret prayer or an unconfessed attachment ; but whereas a prayer is called by scoffers superstitious, and an untold attachment may be mocked as a piece of fine sentiment, the private opinion is universally allowed to be the robust right of every normal reasoning being. There is, even to the cynical, no nonsense, no hypocrisy in the reserved idea : that is what one really thinks ; that is what the departing soul would, if it could, proclaim to a generation still embodied in the flesh. It may be an instinctive belief in a hard dogma ; it may be no more than a doubt about some legendary excellence. I have heard, for instance, of a second wife whose penultimate utterance on earth was : “ Can that all have been Emily’s own hair ?

ON PRIVATE OPINIONS

Such wads and mountains!" Her husband replied that he had seen it hanging in braids down Emily's back. "I suppose you know," were the wife's last words, "that one can tie on braids." She had studied in silence her predecessor's portrait, by Millais, for fifteen years, and she had yielded to none in her spoken tributes to Emily's chestnut chignon. This particular private opinion, while it was honest, may not have been welcome to the lady's relatives, but, as a rule, the secret criticism is accepted by every hearer with delight, and it seems curious that there should be such a general reluctance to reveal thoughts which, once owned, are nearly always found to be in harmony with common sense. Common sense, in fact, owes its very strength and authority to the accumulated private opinions of mankind. Still, although one may be warned that this and the other is

ON PRIVATE OPINIONS

contrary to common sense, or, fortified by the recommendation that common sense is in one's favour, common sense in itself remains undefined, and unascertainable. "What is all this about *geist*?" asked an uncouth, much adored person who knew nothing of the Time-Spirit or German metaphysic. The question, because of its frankness, was a flicker contributed to the better illumination of men's two paths—the broad as well as the narrow, for it is a mistake, many find, to assume that all the sunshine and most of the apparent certainty in stepping is among the sinners. The ungovernable charm of sinners so named lies, no doubt, in their willingness to speak out. This makes them enticing company, and often a man is blamed for mixing with disreputable associates when it is not their wickedness at all but their candour which calls to him. But the candour is not perhaps about the best

ON PRIVATE OPINIONS

things in life, so the instruction gained is partial only and the light thrown does not go far. Gentle souls study poetry for some corroboration of their private ideas, and they may conquer their reticence so far that they will under-line the passages rather near those which they feel the most. But the boldest among people who deserve to be called good—in the vigorous sense—will seldom be quite sincere.

Perhaps this is why obscurity is still considered distinguished in philosophical writings, and a merit in a poem. It ought to be called the eternal hinderer.

Tragedy and Seriousness

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

THE word tragedy, used in connection with modern plays, has become exclusively associated with costumes of some period, a preposterous bearing on the part of the actors, unmitigated gloom in the plot, and blank verse from the author. The verse is often good—as verse, but it is thin where tragedy may be said to begin—on all the deep minor chords. A warm-hearted listener will wonder why, when there is such a sad story, so much display of emotion, so much dark scenery, and so much picturesque language, he does not feel,

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

in the least degree, moved. Is the fault in his own temperament, or with the poet, or with the acting? I believe that the reason for the disappointment all round is to be found in this fact: the consequences of any action are no longer regarded as eternal or even irremediable; they may be serious—they cannot be everlasting; they may be hard—they cannot be beyond some alleviation. The new view of existence is not exactly cynical—because cynicism is based on some system, at least, of thought or philosophy; but it is flippant. Nothing is supposed to matter very much; the weak may perish; the strong must “buck up.” Hence, for example, the difference between the Italian and the English conceptions of Francesca da Rimini. The Francesca of Dante and D’Annunzio sees an actual, burning, perpetual Hell before her eyes; she is immortal; her soul will pay for ever the

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

price of treachery and the price of illicit love ; there is a horrible grandeur in her bargain ; her speech about the fire, in the second act, has an ominous and appalling significance ; fire is her element—it can torture, but it will never consume her ; she loves it—she is drawn towards it, and she smiles, without self-pity, into the encroaching flames. Here we have sin on the majestic scale ; we may be afraid of such a woman—we do not despise her, and we realise that her love, while it lacks beauty, has divinity—evil divinity, yet, nevertheless, divinity. In the English tragedy—which has its own gracious literary merits—we wholly miss that sense of a defiant passion and its unending punishment ; we are given instead some pretty love-making, a little excusable deceit, some childish misgivings and a violent revenge. The love seems pathetic ; the atrocious murder unreal. We allow the flirtation—can it

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

be much more? the two are so young, so feeble. We cannot accept the butchery—what is it but melodrama? What a fuss! Who cares? What an impossible husband! And afterwards? There is no afterwards; the deluge comes no more. So the audience, to a lively air in rag-time, are played out of the theatre: “Tragedy is a mistake. Things don’t happen that way. Are we too late for a hot supper?”

Suppose we have a sorrowful plot taken from contemporary life. Here, at any rate, we need not hurl our minds into the Middle Ages, or load our imaginations with unaccustomed solemnity. The playwright may warn us that his work is a serious business—that is to say, it must be taken seriously; he will introduce comic characters, but his protagonists will seldom, if ever, smile, and they will be dreary in the dreariest way if, by some accident in common prudence,

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

they get into some transitory trouble. What happens? In some recent plays of so-called "serious" interest the spectator's joy is in the secondary characters only: they alone talk as most modern people think; they alone behave as modern people—for the greater part—behave. They are not heroic, but they are conceivable. They do not pretend to feel more than they feel, and their vulgarity springs freshly from their inmost beliefs; if they ever prayed, their prayers would be as vulgar as their conversation. How many vulgar prayers are offered daily, and simply—petitions for quite ignominious or absurd or trivial things! But vulgarity has a positive imperishable charm; it is sham nobility that is revolting. And sham nobility is the disease of our heroes and heroines in serious drama or fiction. They cry, they faint, they moan, they justify themselves at length; they are artfully driven by

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

their author into dilemmas which a "funny" character would get out of without a single tirade or an attitude—far less a "curtain." But the need of nobility is in their wires; they must, by some means, be "noble"; they must excite pity and terror for their fate—a fate, which, given to the secondary lovers, would provoke exhilarating amusement. Alas! poor author! His best language and all his reading will not help him. An action cannot be dignified, or be made to seem so, unless its acknowledged responsibilities are great—great for good or great for woe. All the tall talk from classic sources will count for nothing—except transparent and fatuous hypocrisy—if the thought, underlying the deed, be squalid or petty. Thus, the average playgoer, unconscious of his own mental processes, thinks vaguely: "What is wrong here? The situation in this play would be funny at

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

the Gaiety. If Connie Ediss were the woman, and Edmund Payne were the man, I should be roaring with laughter. But here I am depressed. I can't swallow it."

The point of view in Gaiety comedies is the national point of view; it is neither tragic nor serious; on the other hand it makes no concession to sham nobility, and it does not encourage false ideals. It does not claim to be profound, and lovers of honesty would be dismayed if it tried to soar—for, so far as it goes, it is faithful to the truths of daily experience—whereas our serious plays are not faithful to the truths of daily, or uncommon, experience. Lately, in some large provincial towns, I have seen performances given of a "serious" play, which, in London and in the great cities of America, has had an enormous success, but, where a London audience might have been urged to sentimentality or driven

TRAGEDY AND SERIOUSNESS

to uncomfortable reticence, the hardy provincials shouted happily ; every touch of forced emotion, every line of tawdry rhetoric, met with a guffaw from the men, a titter from the women—best sign of all. They applauded the performers, but they could not accept, with gravity, balderdash.

The point for authors to consider, therefore, in choosing a plot would seem to be this : Can they afford to treat its psychology fairly and squarely ? Can they say, straight out, what they know ? If they cannot, then let them leave it alone. The Connie Ediss and Edmund Payne test seems a sound one. Would these two delicious comedians make the “big speeches” grotesque ? It is certain that they could not make the text of D’Annunzio’s “Francesca” ridiculous, or the “Agamemnon” ridiculous, or any Shakespearean tragedy ridiculous, or any good Donnay, or Sudermann, or

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Hauptmann, ridiculous. The text of these masters is widely different, but it is infallibly true, in each separate case, to its subject and period. But give a few of our modern "serious" dramas to the Gaiety company, and we should soon understand why we, with the utmost longing to be sympathetic, cannot feel stirred by our most accomplished "emotional" actors in "strong" parts. The "strong" parts are nothing in the world: they are weak mechanisms doing weak things weakly; they are out of drawing and out of tune; they belong to the realm of burlesque, and the tragic Muse herself would smile at them till she cried.

On the Best Reasons

ON THE BEST REASONS

I HAVE an acquaintance whose agitated existence is spent in listening to the twitters of "little birds," and the murmuring of "*on dits*," and the rumble of "certain rumours." Her vivacious hearing, moreover, is coupled with considerable facility in speech: she repeats the twitters, the *on dits*, and the rumours, while her enthusiasm is such that she would sooner see her best friend unhappy for life than find any one of the twitters untrue, or even inaccurate. She has always the best reason, unfortunately (she will add), for knowing the contrary

ON THE BEST REASONS

of any pleasant supposition. Now, if she were not an excellent woman in a number of ways, she would not be worth discussion; but she is so kind to the poor and so obliging to the necessitous that no student of humanity could refrain from studying, *con amore*, her case. Her conscientious employment of that strange abstract—the *best reason*—is, in itself, a bait for the highest and driest, as well as the most human and genial, among philosophic minds. What is the best reason? Who, on earth, is not in quest of it? Who, of the learned, has not attempted to define it? My acquaintance, at the least sign of doubt in a fellow-creature, announces firmly that she has the best reason for her opinion; she seems certain; she triumphs; and not infrequently she looks sky-ward after the delivery of her narrative for some picturesque miracle indicative of providential approbation. Once, in a

ON THE BEST REASONS

bold mood, I asked her whether she ever had the *worst* reasons for a particular belief. She showed much forbearance, but no understanding, and I have been told since that she kept her temper by remembering the stories which had reached her of my unquestionable eccentricity. I was haunted, however, by my own speculations: where do the best reasons come from? Is the Little Bird's twitter final? Or does the acceptance of a reason on the part of others depend on our own air of infallibility in proclaiming it? It would seem that the great art is to acquire the convinced air. My own few strong opinions are based on years of research, tests, experiments, and observation; but I have never heard the Little Bird, and, for all my work, I am timid in the presence of my acquaintance who hears the Little Bird every day without any trouble or thought. She meets some one in the street; they

ON THE BEST REASONS

converse on the weather ; a name may be mentioned ; a second name may be introduced : the trick is done :

“ The Mallerbys have lost their money, and Miss, who thought herself an heiress, will have nothing. Major Hawkins ought to be warned in time.”

Or it may be a larger matter :—

“ Lord Brickshire refused the Secretaryship because Lady B. wants him to wait for something better. The Duke is in despair, because Lord B. is the stupidest man they can have, with any safety, in the Cabinet.”

All these statements seem credible enough, and they might be accepted on their surface value. But cases arise which are not plausible at all, which contradict all we know about the individuals in question and life as it strikes the least subtle : nevertheless, any person of ingenuous stupidity who will tattle on the Best Reason basis will be thought,

ON THE BEST REASONS

on the whole, right, when a wiser person, who might attempt to point out improbabilities in a rumour, would be condemned as being, on the whole, wrong. The best reason is often another name for industrious lying. There is, to give praise where it is deserved, a fine energy in the iniquitous Little Bird: she loves her own false little songs—she is never weary of singing them; and as more truthful creatures are generally languid, or cautious, or mute, the Little Bird has a grateful, expectant world ever listening for her revelations. It is unjust to blame her inventive faculty; and when I remember how my diligent acquaintance will walk miles, and write hundreds of notes, and attend innumerable functions in her zeal for the propaganda of fables, I feel that some reproach is due to the veracious and prudent who will take no trouble at all to spread facts.

The Transposition of Circumstances

THE TRANSPOSITION OF CIRCUMSTANCES

SINGERS often have songs transposed from one key to another, and the unmusical suppose that this radical change does not concern the composer, or affect—beyond the pitch—a song. But pitch may be called the soul of any work of art—whether designed for the orchestra, the singer, the stage, the library, or the picture gallery. The pitch, in fact, is the first question which has to be decided before an imaginative or rhetorical work can be carried out : it is to the whole what the ground plan is to the architect.

CIRCUMSTANCES

Some time ago I told one of my friends, who is a distinguished foreign playwright, the story of three humble people in an obscure village. The story was dramatic : uncommon : picturesque. My friend repeated it to a well-known London manager. The manager paced the floor. "Give it a society setting," said he ; "turn the man into a Prime Minister, the woman into a duchess—or something of the kind—(we haven't had a marchioness lately) ; turn the other man into the Leader of the Opposition, and we shall have a big money-maker ! " My friend tried to explain that if the three people had been respectively a Prime Minister, a duchess, and an ex-Prime Minister, the story could not have happened at all ; and it happened because the hero was a shepherd, and the woman was a hand in a corset factory, and the other man was a paper-hanger ; and also because the place was lonely and the

CIRCUMSTANCES

distractions were rare. But the manager saw no reason why the changes which he proposed were out of the question: he saw "situations," and the key of the dialogue or of the deeds seemed to him of no consequence. My friend, happily, had a firm will, and his play, founded on the humble case, will be produced, at its true pitch by the first company, at the finest theatre, in Germany. Let us reverse the conditions. Let us suppose that the manager was struggling and poor; that he could not afford the costly dresses, fine furniture, and elaborate scenes which are considered indispensable to plays about the rich or the well-to-do. Let us suppose that one had an excellent story about some temporarily important individuals who lived in a great city and moved in what is known as the highest society. The city, the circle, and the daily education of the individuals are not accidents in the story, but the cause

CIRCUMSTANCES

of the story. If, for economical reasons, we turn our duke into a ruined stock-broker, and our ladyship into a clergyman's widow, and our villain into a solicitor's clerk, we are tampering—not with fancies—but the very mainsprings of psychology. No educated writer would listen, for a moment, to such suggestions, and this is why it is sometimes pretended in this country that novelists of the first rank do not produce good “workable” stage plays. They rightly refuse to write against their own knowledge; they rightly refuse to introduce inappropriate, old-fashioned rhetoric into modern realistic dialogue; they rightly refuse to give the familiar idioms of melodrama to work dealing with modern society; they rightly refuse to make Cabinet Ministers talk in their houses as they talk on platforms; they rightly refuse to give “titles” to studies of lower middle-class life; and they

CIRCUMSTANCES

rightly refuse to make their titled characters prattle as notorious and unpleasant members of the advertised aristocracy are reported to prattle in the published descriptions of legal proceedings.

I do not care what sort of person a player may represent, so long as it is a person in tune—that is to say, pitched in the right key, and here, I believe, every theatre-goer is with me. One must have a great deal of experience before one can decide on the fidelity of every creation—a reason why the best work demands the best kind of audience. For instance, the sincerity of Lord Beaconsfield's marvellous studies of English society is just beginning to be understood ; his caricatures were always accepted ; his portraits—some of them as fine as the portraits of Velasquez and Vandyck in another sphere of art—were understood at first by those only who were in touch with the originals.

CIRCUMSTANCES

Their pitch is perfect. Any successful English dramatist of his own day would have thought him a trifler, and the critics would have complained that his masterly dialogue did not "carry" over the footlights. It will "carry" through the centuries.

**On the Eloquence
of the Dumb Dog**

ON THE ELOQUENCE OF THE DUMB DOG

THE small social circle near my obscure retreat is composed of six agricultural labourers, an architect, and two peers. There are other human beings scattered about the neighbourhood, but they wish to be uncivil to each other—and I prefer not to run the risk of catching their distinction. There is nothing so contagious as the distinction of small people who employ three brow-beaten servants and, on principle, never eat hot food on Sunday. I cannot—I dare not know them. We are, however, on bowing terms, and I am informed that

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when I die they, or their representatives, as a mark of respect, will make a point of attending my funeral. Thus we exist—a few acres and many gulfs apart. But let me return to my circle. The two peers are old and infirm: they can make nothing of the speeches they read in the newspapers, and they have lost all their ready money in Steel Trusts and African Mines. They speak beautiful English: their voices are the most agreeable imaginable: they resemble superb portraits, and they wear clothes which would be shabby if they were new. They are old, however, and thus they have gained dignity by preservation. The candour of these noblemen, their gentleness, their fear of lawyers, and their terror at the prospect of any change in the conditions under which they suffer in silence, fascinate me. When they talk I seem to be reading some perfect page from a great literary masterpiece: they

THE DUMB DOG

say the same rather foolish things in the same matchless way, and in the same pleasing tone, over and over again. What does that matter? The rhythm is ever preserved: the underlying emotion is constant: the phrases they employ convey incomparably well their state of mind. My part, in fact, in any dialogue is just this little refrain, which runs at fixed intervals like a line in a rondeau:

“I know what you mean.”

It will be seen that the psychology of the two peers is easy—even for beginners. I could say more about the architect, whose case is complex and whose intellect is of a peculiar quality. There are moments when I believe he will turn into a little model of some early Gothic tomb. Another time I must describe him carefully, for, so far, he has baffled all the experts in my own line of sympathetic investigation. The six

THE DUMB DOG

agricultural labourers remain ; these, too, are dumb dogs : they cannot bark. But while I enjoy the two peers and the architect, they have neither the profundity, nor the mysteriousness, the delicate unsuspected sentiments, nor the strange silent pride of the six field men. One of the six was lately stricken with illness. He went to London with his wife for a holiday ; he ate some tinned food in a gaudy restaurant, and he lies now with five eminent physicians standing round his hospital bed. He wonders why he is suddenly so important, and he has his wife's best silk handkerchief (used on Sundays only) under his pillow—for company.

“ You need rest and sleep,” said I.

“ I am getting it now,” he said, smiling without bitterness, and he asked me, in a whisper, when he thought no one was looking, to come again, because I could make him laugh. No one has ever

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heard him laugh, and few have ever heard him speak. In twelve years I have rarely caught more than a murmured "Yes" or "No" given with evident reluctance. The doctors say that his sufferings must have been intense—no moan ever escaped him till he became delirious, and even then, his complaining might have passed for a song ill sung. When he was carried from his lodgings on a stretcher to the ambulance, he said nothing, but he trembled violently, and a doctor asked whether he ever drank—so little does the average medical practitioner know about nervous temperaments, and so little human feeling is looked for in a common labourer who cannot talk or write. He quivered as I have seen blindfolded horses quiver in the arenas of Spain: they do not behold the adversary; they cannot tell their fear; they have had no prior experience to warn them of what will inevitably come; but something

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within them suffers and foresees ; they are nobly obedient in silence and they perish horribly also in silence. They are dumb : they cannot bark.

Among the educated classes, and among the higher animals, this agony of constitutional silence is relieved by music. We see thousands of unhappy, or at least melancholy, persons at every large concert—who go not to hear singing, but to hear the orchestra. It is their voice—their interpreter. These people seldom care for grand opera, with its stage and its “stars”—who, by the time they are famous enough to “draw,” are too massive and disillusioned to act, and far less suggest, any composer’s poetical intention. No ; the relief comes from pure music only, which has no advertised individual—except the conductor—to disturb its beauty and significance. And a conductor—whose very art is the art of subserviency to an ideal—is the symbol

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of the dumb dog's pulse: his beat is always the beat of an emotion—it may be quick, it may be slow, it may be wild, irregular, or placid—but it has no sound. My friend, the labourer, has a musical box with five tunes, which can be exchanged for five other tunes, by arrangement, every three months. He has had this treasure now for several quarters, but he will not have the tunes changed yet because, I understand, he is getting quite fond of them, and he begins to know them. One tune, "You take the high road, and I'll take the low road," makes him sad, and he has it played once to three "go's" of "I'm Piggie Hoggenheimer of Park Lane." His expression during the Hoggenheimer ballad would baffle a Lord of Appeal. Does it voice some subtle ambition? does it give substance to some early dream? does it hold some careless rapture which might, but for the musical box, have been lost?

THE DUMB DOG

I cannot get an answer to these questions. But, before the poor soul went to the hospital, he would play a bad game of draughts with his brother-in-law while the two-guinea machine—the two guineas were left him as a legacy—tinkled out “Under the Deodar” ten times without stopping. Once I asked him what the tune made him think about, or what he thought of the tune. He said it was what the bands played.

The other day, when I saw him in the hospital, I found tears on his face.

“Is there anything you want?” I asked.

His wife, who is not dumb, spoke for him:

“They won’t give him any medicine. And he’s such a one for taking medicine. The worse it is, the better he swollers it. He wants to show them all how beautiful he can take it—without a murmur!”

He moved his swollen eyelids in confirmation of her statement.

Poor, magnificent dumb dog.

**The Disappearance of
The "Jeune Premier"**

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE "JEUNE PREMIER"

LAST week I went to London, saw the plays again, joined a dinner party; and heard, therefore, and saw many strange things. At the dinner, for instance, I happened to sit next to a distinguished politician who had once, he informed me, loved the drama better than any other art. "As a boy," he began, and he went on, in the ingenuous way characteristic of really first-rate Englishmen, to describe his simple taste for truth and sentimentality combined. "But," he said, at the end, with a sigh, "I do not go to the theatres now. No

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one can act the *jeune premier* because the *jeune premier* no longer exists in society. There is no Montague, no H. B. Conway, on the stage because there is no dear George d'Alroy in modern life. An actor in mimetic—he cannot imitate unless he has some model. A playwright cannot please his audience by drawing a type which has ceased to exist. The race of romantic lovers is dead." I told my acquaintance that his opinion, as a man of the world, supported my own, which was frankly that of a recluse. I had been re-reading Octave Feuillet's "Romance of a Poor Young Man" and it had seemed to me that the Book of Joshua (edited) was more in touch with modern feeling than this play, which, not so very long ago, enchanted and convinced the European and American public.

"Better death than dishonour!" exclaims the hero, leaping from a high

THE "JEUNE PREMIER"

tower in order to avoid compromising a lady who by accident had been locked with him in an isolated room of a lonely ruin. Nowadays the two would have played bridge, smoked, and waited till dawn, or the arrival of a search party : the lady might have been a little compromised, but the young gentleman, in any event, would not have cared in the least.

The exclamation, " Better death than dishonour ! " followed by a reckless leap, would be greeted, at the present day, with unrestrained laughter from the auditorium. . We have gained no doubt in reasonableness since the 'thirties, 'sixties, and 'seventies of the last century, and neither my acquaintance, the ex-Minister, nor myself, the lonely student, would wish to see all the old twaddle and false sentiment revived. But the sentiment which is false now was not false formerly : the great ruthless public

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has never responded, and can never be made to respond, to ideas which contradict its education. And here we come to the root of the matter. The education of the imaginative faculties and the ideals of romance have been taken absolutely from the national education in every class. Imagination is now confined to the real believers among Roman Catholics, the Jews, and the Orientals. It is not acuteness or unscrupulousness which makes the commonest Jew successful in business: it is his power of imagination—his ability to foresee the developement of an idea, and his instinct for romance in the true sense of the word. To most people the word romance suggests unreality, shams, the unpractical, the illogical, the fantastic, the impossible. To the sincere Roman Catholic, the Jew, and the Oriental it means the essence of everything that is worth time, or money, or thought: imagination is rightly treated

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as one of the highest intellectual faculties, and it is cultivated by the Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Oriental systems of education to the highest possible pitch. It is abused—everything human is abused—but of all our powers, it is certainly the one which distinguishes us as human beings from the brutes. And the *jeune premier* is another creature who was not brutal. He was exalted, he was fond of rhetoric and he lived, as it were, rhetorically: he tossed his hair about, he enjoyed a good gesture, and he would only abandon one noble attitude by assuming another; but he had a warm, generous heart, and he could send his kind soul into worlds elsewhere at a moment's notice. He loved with all his might, and the sterner the parent, the harder the fate, the crueller his adversities, the more he loved, and the more beautifully he expressed his emotions in a voice which grew stronger and more melodious

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as his cares became more squalid and depressing. An attic enchanted him; debts roused him to enthusiasm; duns inspired his best utterances; shabby raiment made his countenance the more striking. He was a splendid creature: they have taken him away, and they have given us nothing in exchange.

"As a boy," said my acquaintance, as he left me, "I loved dear George d'Alroy. I can't stand these new fellows—I daresay they are true enough to life, or they would be true—if they didn't talk so much drivel and try to look like Ruy Blas at the end of each act! If you want to look like Ruy Blas you must be doing the kind of things he did!"

That is another trouble, the leading man will still try to look like a *jeune premier*—the tradition, in the matter of appearance, still holds. And this is why

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one hears so much smothered laughter during tragic scenes. Can one talk like a domesticated poodle and pass for Prometheus? No.

Passion at Parties

PASSION AT PARTIES

IN speaking of my neighbours, I forgot to name a certain pretty lady. The omission was curious, but one's memory plays odd tricks. This particular pretty lady has a small nose, yet a most determined will ; her pleasure is to take me where I do not wish to go, and to make me listen to sermons which I do not care to hear. She will sit in front of me—(many prefer her full face and she is well aware of the opinion) ; she will assure me that I am losing touch with humanity—(I see her often, too) ; she will bring clouds into her eyes

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at the thought of my slow heart—(I have reason to know that my heart beats, if anything, too quickly); she refuses to believe that I am happy—(I encourage the doubt because her solicitude on the subject is thrilling in proportion to the gloom I can assume). The cure she suggests for my precarious condition is more parties and more church. I thought, therefore, of giving this short paper a sub-title—"Manners at Church"—because the association of thoughts in my mind between church manners and passion at parties is based on one main root idea of what is inappropriate. Let me explain myself at once. In obedience to the pretty lady's invitation, I attended a party on Wednesday and I went to church on Sunday. As I was announced at the party, a young marchioness of the strictest virtue was entreating some one to "clasp her once more" and "kiss her once more." Her voice, which was

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very high and very light, must have pierced the assembled nobility and gentry who sat in front of her on chairs as she insisted on her imperative need of "one more long look," "one more mad hour." In my nervousness, I stepped on a jet bead which had fallen from some dress trimming on to the floor. The noise of the breaking bead disturbed the rapt listeners; I was stared at; the Lord Lieutenant's wife said, sternly, "Hush!" and my apology was drowned by a further cry from the marchioness to the effect that she was her love's and he and she were one. The next singer was a girl—a shy creature who blushed when the curate offered her some muffins. Nevertheless, she burst without a qualm, into a coon song which, in Greek, would have been indecent, and, in plain English, revolting. But as it was written in a sham dialect, its grossness seemed entirely acceptable to

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the hearers, all of whom were quite the nicest people, as my pretty friend told me afterwards. I have heard songs sung in all languages and in many cities of the world (I have not always been a recluse); I cannot be shocked, and everything which is commonly called improper is, to me, either tragic, or insane—never, by any chance, funny. Inappropriateness, however, I do feel, and it seemed to me that the two modest and virtuous ladies who warbled things, which are never uttered in public and seldom spoken at all, to a room full of other virtuous and modest women—either did not realise what they were saying or hoped that the others would imagine they did not. The listeners, on the other hand, were in a similar position and hoped that they passed—to the singers—for persons wholly ignorant of the elementary facts of human life. Hypocrisy of this kind makes an atmosphere distressing.

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Each one seems to be saying to his or her neighbour, "We know what it must mean, but we suppose it doesn't really." (I use the easy idioms of modern conversation.) After the party I said to my pretty friend, "Thank God, you do not sing coon songs." She coloured. "Or songs to beloveds," I added. When she is displeased, she moves her shoulders as birds do when they are putting their wings in order for flight. I caught this remark:

"I never listen to the words."

I knew then that she had not missed a syllable.

On Sunday she was less animated, I thought, yet quite as determined. We sat side by side during the service, and she looked at me once only—when the priest entered the pulpit. He was permitted to read the text in comparative silence, and I saw, at a glance, that he had something to say. But, whereas

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one could have heard a bead breaking while the young woman howled in an intoxicated tone a repulsive coon song, every member of the congregation seemed affected, during the sermon, with an irrepressible whooping or rasping cough. The truer the priest's remarks, the louder the noise became; any brute or fowl among its kind has better manners than the average man and woman during a truthful sermon. I had not been inside a church for a very long time: I had only been to places of so-called amusement where the smallest bodily movement—and far more a loud breath—is violently resented by one's neighbours. But I waited vainly for some one to say "Hush" to the deliberate coughers, sneezers, sniffers, and outrageous disturbers of the peace in the House of God. Here was a case where one could not pretend to misunderstand the speaker's meaning. It was too

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clear, and it was not altogether flattering to humanity. The coughers, therefore, were possibly coughing down their own chagrin and their own self-distrust. But I kept thinking of the breathless county families and the young marchioness shrieking for one more mad hour—one more wild kiss and the heart that was to beat against hers “under apple trees.” Yet when a man asks solemnly—“*How shall God judge the world?*”—there is not a throat in a thousand that is not immediately assailed with croup.

On Musical Comedies and the State

ON MUSICAL COMEDIES AND THE STATE

I WAS reading, for the third time, some especially striking chapters in Mr. Morley's "Life of Gladstone," and I found a piece of news which offered a curious commentary on Mr. John Hare's letter to *The Times* on the subject of State-aided theatres. In 1830, when Gladstone was one-and-twenty, the Essay Club, founded by himself at Oxford, pronounced "the influence of the modern drama, though trifling in degree, pernicious in quality." This was the modern drama of seventy-three years ago. Mr. Hare's verdict comes to much the same

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thing. He deplores the standard of acting in so-called serious plays and high comedy ; he fears that musical comedies will soon usurp the boards of every theatre in England. Every author of serious plays and the like must wish to agree with Mr. Hare, who is one of the few great artists—I dare not give the precise number—we possess. But he does not see that the sole reason why the public prefer the productions of Mr. George Edwardes is because the acting is so clever, the lyrics (those by Adrian Ross, for instance) are often as good as the famous stuff given in volumes of classic humour, the music is refreshing, and the whole show, from start to finish, is alive, national, and, as an entertainment, unique in Europe. For half a guinea I can see at the New Gaiety some brilliant low comedy impersonations, some charming dancing, and some highly accomplished young actresses. I can

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hear witty songs written by educated writers; I am given some delicious fooling in the dialogue, and as much plot as I want—a pleasant diagram, in fact, of the British character. For half a guinea I can also see, at another kind of theatre, one or two artists abominably depressed—I cannot say, supported by some inaudible recruits (or persons who have no right to be on any stage) working their ineffective way through some tedious piece without form and void, about nothing on earth. There is no one-star system yet in the casting of musical plays: the sterilising word *literature* has not yet been applied to musical plays: the gifted being who believes that he (or she) alone, talking incessantly—no matter how foolishly—ought to fill any spectator's mind with delight has had, so far, no run for his or her backer's money, in musical plays. The "backer," I am informed, is a person

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who is expected to "find" (the expression has its pathos) some large sum, or sums, which will pay all the costs of a production and keep the "house full," for fifty nights at least, of people who look prosperous and never buy their seats. The legend : *House full—300th performance*—does not, therefore, invariably mean that the gross receipts for each week are, say, two thousand pounds. It does not mean that the author is receiving several hundreds weekly, that the manager is "rolling," that the leading man is enjoying the salary of an overworked Lord Beaconsfield, that the leading lady earns more in one month than a bishop in one quarter. It may mean quite often that the "backer," or the "backers," are most unhappy ; that bills have been paid and nothing has prospered ; it may mean, in short, that the advertised, boomed, puffed, and tortured "success" has been extraordinary only as a financial loss.

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This fact ought to encourage Mr. Hare. The public will not be bored. It will not endure twaddle. It will not stand the wretched elocution of which he justly complains. His own is perfect. If the masses—and above all, the well-to-do and upper classes—prefer music-halls and musical comedies to the legitimate drama, it is because the legitimate drama at present is not very good and not well acted—even when it is tolerably composed. There is no false sentiment in “The Orchid”: the burlesque is true to burlesque; the social and political hits which occur in the dialogue and in the songs are struck from a close observation of current manners, opinions, and the like. I have said this, in other ways, before, but the actor-managers of theatres devoted to drama seldom attend performances at Daly’s, the Gaiety, or the Lyric. They do not know the remarkably strong attractions they have to strive against,

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and they do not see a fine art and a school of excellent acting—at once very direct and very subtle—developing under their noses. If a distinguished foreigner comes to England, he is taken, by a discerning guide, to the Houses of Parliament, to Ascot, to the Eton and Harrow match, to the Law Courts, to all the musical comedies of the first rank, and to every one of the Music-halls. He will then know this country, and understand why it is impossible to bring the English stage into touch with officialism. All the officials very rightly prefer musical comedies to any other kind of average English comedy; laws about a thing so elusive and delightful would be disastrous; the paraphernalia of committees would destroy the spontaneity of the players: an art with such charms to recommend it may have a million patrons, but one President would kill it. As for a governing body——

**On Proper
Pride**

ON PROPER PRIDE

WHEN I was a boy, my two aunts, now grandmothers, were young, very handsome girls. One had the kind of beauty which is superstitiously known as the beauty of the devil; the other had the kind of beauty which is attributed to the Madonna. The two sisters were rarely in agreement, and the devilish charmer was always accusing the gentle one of forgetting her "Proper Pride."

"Where," she would exclaim, "is your proper pride?"

This question, which was never answered, has haunted me through life: for

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years I wondered what Proper Pride—as opposed to the familiar deadly sin—could be. Yesterday I asked my friend, the pretty lady, what it was. “A deadly bore,” said she. Her mind is untrained, and she is incapable of tracing her own best guesses to their legitimate source in the common heart of mankind. On this occasion, as on many others, she was right without knowing it. Proper Pride is, no doubt, the deadliest bore in our moral equipment. “As usual,” I said to my pretty friend, “you have given me an idea,” and, as I left her, I heard her murmur: “Now he has got all he wanted, he goes. If I had any Proper Pride, I’d never see him again!”

This murmur pursued me: I composed long letters to her as I walked home. When I reached home I thought I ought to return and explain my moodiness, which arose, I intended to assure her, from humility, not from ingratitude,

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never from egoism. But I feared to give a wrong impression : I did not write the letter : I did not go back. Three hours later, after hating my dinner, shunning my favourite books, and assuming an icy air towards my devoted housekeeper, I realised that I myself was suffering from an acute attack of Proper Pride. In more ignorant days, I might have called it dignity.

As I paced the floor and tried to persuade my better judgment (another strange moral tyrant) that I was a fool, I thought of many examples, instances, and illustrations of Proper Pride in history and my immediate experience—all of which had made for much unnecessary pain, a good deal of lying, not a few crimes, and mischief everywhere. I could not remember, or discover, one case where Proper Pride had led to anything except evil and sorrow. My own little ache was a trifle—although it has since

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manifested itself in the form of a rash on my arm, which baffles the local doctor, but then he does not understand the close connection between the soul and the nerves.

We all know that Proper Pride is the broad root from which all love stories in fiction, drama, and poetry fatally grow—either for sadness or delight. It is Proper Pride which estranges the fondest of couples: it is Proper Pride which drives well-treated husbands to the worst excesses of jealousy: it is Proper Pride which urges a girl to refuse the one man whom she wishes to accept: it is Proper Pride which restrains the noble, if impoverished, suitor from saying the least word which could be construed into a profession of even temperate regard for the “idol of his existence”: it is Proper Pride, in fact, which makes so many people insincere, and so many others angry. And, as it affects individuals, it

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influences nations. There have been few great wars in the cause of justice: thousands of lives have been sacrificed, millions have been squandered: cities have been made desolate for no worse offence than a fancied slight to some Government's Proper Pride, and for no better reason than a display of the same abstract. But what is it? It is, as we have seen, the cause of battles, of suicides, of unhappy love, and nettle-rash, yet I am prepared to swear that it is a manufactured—as opposed to a natural—calamity. We are not born with this bore attached to our sufficiently oppressed spirits: it is added to us first by our parents, relatives, nurses and other guardians, then by the education we receive, then by the books we read, then by the counsel of our friends—themselves groaning under the burden of the incubus. Reduced to its simplest form, Proper Pride and its exercise may be called the restraint of every kind

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impulse which makes for the simplification of human affairs—whether on the trivial or the grand scale.

To return to my handsome young aunts. I remember well that the more dashing of the two was a woman who abandoned herself, without a misgiving, to the pleasure of thinking aloud. As a thought entered her head she expressed it; the fact that she contradicted herself at least eighteen times a day never disturbed her equanimity; she refused incessant offers of marriage and she had three husbands (one of whom she left because she did not see why she should live with him); at sixty she had a girl's complexion, but at twenty-seven she had lost her figure (here was a point where Proper Pride might have been advantageous); she had any number of children; they all adored her, disobeyed her, and disappointed her. I have seen her laugh by the hour and cry by the hour; she is called impossible

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because she is purely natural ; boys who gave her sweets when she was a little girl, now, as elderly gentlemen with dignified wives brimful of self-respect, will walk (with gout) miles to see her—if only to refresh their memories of her imperfection. I will own that her life, criticised by those who are disenamoured of candour, has not been in any material sense successful. Her income depends, in the main, on the life assurance policy taken out by the least reputable of her three husbands ; years ago she spent her paternal inheritance in various benevolent schemes for amusing the poor. The county, however, forgets its snobbery when it calls upon her, and, under her childlike smile, the Lord Lieutenant dissolves into a human being. She has no proper pride—she can love geese, charwomen, marchionesses, and the green-grocer with an equal and constant love. One of her friends is the district coroner

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who is but thirty-three, although he has sat on two thousand seven hundred and four inquests. To numbers, he would seem depressing. Another friend is a duke without a palate. "Still," as she says, "for a duke, he is very clean and tidy." He tells her about his incorrigible sons and their odious women acquaintances. He always protests when he leaves her that he would enjoy his calls far more if he did not invariably meet his wife coming in as he goes out. My aunt cannot see why he should object to this pleasure, and when a busy lady once asked her: "My dear, how can you be so so charming to *both*?" she replied: "You see, they are both so charming to me."

As I have said already, she has no dignity. But I wish I could describe her eyes.

On the Nursery Label

ON THE NURSERY LABEL

MEN, who will watch with painful and inexhaustible solicitude every fluctuation of the money market, and women, who will become inspired in their eagerness to follow every shade of change in a lover's temper, are nevertheless dense, unobservant, and always wrong when they have to deal with the character of any near blood relation. No one denies that an individual is least known by the members of his own family: brothers and sisters on the subject of each other's peculiarities are often very amusing, but they are never

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right. Few parents can manage their own children ; fewer still have the gift of gaining their confidence, and the grinding tragedy of family life lies in the fact that familiarity with a person's mannerisms is accepted indolently as intimacy with that person's heart.¹

In the first place, the label for life is given by the nurse and the nurse-maids—Master Charles is a little pig : Master George is a pretty dear : Miss Ethel is a lamb of a child : Miss Kate is as spiteful and as sly as they make them : Master Wilfred is a selfish, horrid boy : Miss Amy is the biggest liar that ever walked : Master Basil has a nasty, sulky temper : Master Tom is a Turk : Master Percy is as good as gold : Miss Ada is a proud, forward minx no one could take to. And so on. These untrained, misunderstood Masters and Misses, prejudged and influenced by servants (themselves mostly undisciplined),

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grow up : and the nursery label, after a certain period, becomes regarded, if it be unflattering, as a family secret, and if it be flattering, as a family credential. Ethel, for instance, is a pet and a lamb for ever—this is announced from the house-tops : Wilfred, for ever—this is murmured in confidence—has a selfish, horrid disposition. This is silly enough, but there is worse to be told. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that the nursery label, in its crude way, is approximately correct : Basil, at seven, did sulk, and Percy, at eight, was as good as gold. But the discipline of life, of education, of illness perhaps, of sorrow perhaps, of pleasure and success perhaps, of ease and indulgence perhaps, of hard labours and embittering trials perhaps, will make short work of the finest, most careful label ever thought out—whether by the astute governess or the blundering servant. Ethel the

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lamb, under the strain of constant praise, grows gradually into Ethel the tyrant: the proud Ada, after harsh reverses, becomes a sympathetic, silent woman: bold Tom, on the strength of his possibilities in the way of courage, declines into a loafer: the selfish Wilfred, after a few tussles with the egoism of the world, astonishes strangers by his nobility: the despised fool of a family not infrequently makes it famous: the bright hope is too often its most humiliating burden: I do not know of a case where the nursery label found its justification in a career. The label, however, would matter little enough if it did not lead to so much unnecessary pain and confusion in a world where there is already too much grief that is unavoidable. Human beings change hourly and daily, and it is piteous to find people who, while they admit that the laws of transition and development are the first laws of life,

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will not take the trouble to remember them in connection with those whom they are taught to regard as their nearest and dearest.

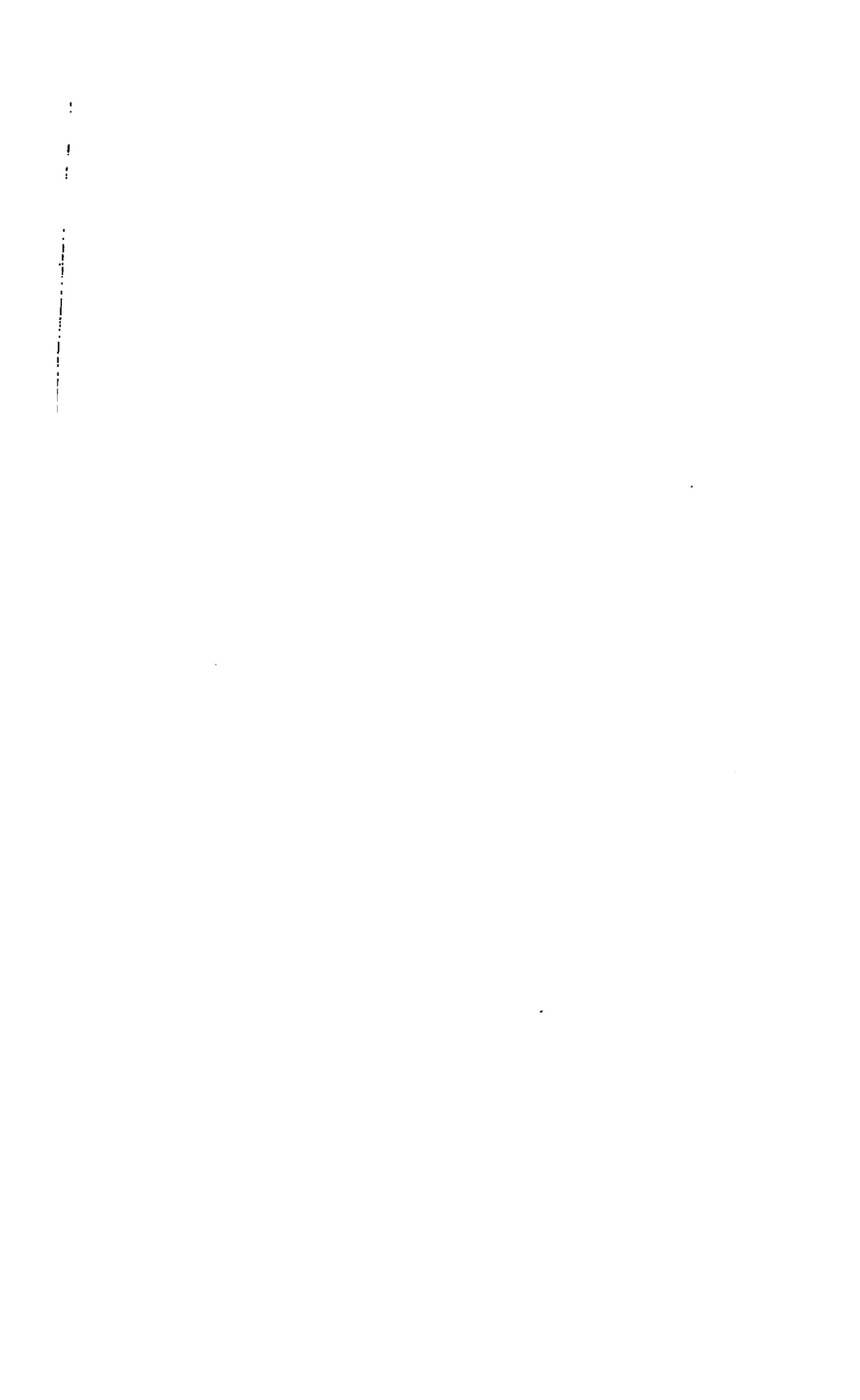
We can all see depressing changes and striking improvements in the relatives of other people: each of us has spent hours of wonder discussing the unkindness and obtuseness of our best friend's parents: there was never yet a marriage made for love, except on the sound basis that the bridegroom's people—though charming—did not understand *him*, and the bride's people—though nice in every way—never really understood *her*. The old worn jokes, of which we are all weary, about mothers-in-law and "in-laws" altogether could not have lasted so long if they had not touched on partial or temporary truth. I say partial or temporary, because I must hope, at least, that it is not eternal. There are signs in the land that the

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great science of human souls—which was always the first consideration in the Catholic religion and in all other mastering religions—is being restored to its right position at the head of all the sciences. It is a monstrous thing to comprehend the stomach of a dead fish and misjudge, through ignorance, your brother's soul. I take the liveliest interest in the anatomy of the dead fish, but it cannot be compared, for a second, with the everlasting importance of a passing mood in a neglected beggar—so highly should we rate the mind of man. I do not say that there is not enough self-analysis and self-introspection. The least sympathetic persons will think willingly and incessantly of themselves: they find clues to their own unknowableness in every novel they consider readable, and in every play they can enjoy. Self-study is to psychology what the practice of scales

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is to the musician—a means of gaining clearness. But just as one may play scales to perfection, yet stumble ignominiously through a fugue by Bach, so the individual may know, beyond praise, himself and his needs and yet go utterly wrong in his estimate of a fellow-creature. Laziness is a genial failing; it has, moreover, an artless, healthy value in this feverish age; I would call it inexcusable only at those moments in a conversation when the nursery label is brought forward, and left uncontradicted for want of a trifling exertion of some one's heart in the direction of justice.



**On the
Neighbour's Burden**

ON THE NEIGHBOUR'S BURDEN

WHEN I was an extremely young man—persons under six-and-twenty years of age now seem to me extremely young—I had a long illness caused by an accident in the hunting field. I suffered a great deal of pain which lowered for ever perhaps my estimate of earthly delight, and I read an enormous number of books—which has deepened my affection for literature. Literature, I must own, far better than life bore the test of torments, exhaustion, sleeplessness, and the dependent, irritating business of a slow convalescence.

ON THE NEIGHBOUR'S BURDEN

The books I read were of every kind and on all subjects. For the steady ache, a fine novel full of sound characterisation keeps the nerves under command. For the intermittent spasm—lyrics, ballads, sonnets, and short poems are best. For the later period, when the body is serenely weak and the mind gains an heroic activity, essays, sermons, memoirs, and histories—so long as the volumes containing them may be held by a tired hand—give the brain full play and the imagination something more vivid than experience. Actual experience is often so quiet, and, in comparison with its description by the accomplished, so unreal. During the latter weeks of my existence on the sofa, an enthusiastic friend, who has since become a nun, used to bring me pocket editions of the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles. They were bound in cloth: they were beautifully printed: the whole epic of

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Job, for instance, did not seem heavier than a letter, and the prophecies of Isaiah were as light as an ordinary song. These enticing books spoilt me for all others: I kept one of them always under my palm, and thus I became well acquainted with the Sacred Text. My enthusiastic friend—a pious, calm, impersonal sort of woman—showed much sympathy for my case, and indeed, for all cases where patience might be considered under a tax. She had an earnest desire to bear her neighbour's burden. "Let us bear one another's burdens," was her favourite entreaty. I meditated; I weighed arguments; I consulted the theological authorities; I fell back on my own knowledge. Alas! one cannot bear one's neighbour's burdens—you may break your own heart out of sheer pity, but your neighbour will be not a whit less oppressed, and, if he has a woe, its gnaw, for all your kindness, will not be a degree

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less voracious. Many moral precepts have thus a galling irony, and people, when they find that their tenderness is un-availing, blame themselves because they cannot find, or give, the comfort they have been piously taught to expect will follow from the sharing of a grief. This is not denial of the power in sympathy, counsel, affection, or comradeship; the power of such gifts is incalculable, but they cannot be transmitted, they can only be exercised for the neighbour's benefit or encouragement. They cannot lessen the burden; they cannot affect those unuttered and unutterable thoughts which dart through the soul; those hours of absolute and unreachable solitariness, those moods when no one really counts and nothing really matters—when the burden, in fact, is so excessive that it becomes its own cure by numbing every faculty and every feeling. I am the last person to restrain enthusiasm, and so,

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while I listen to the generous ideals of my girl friend, I tried to share her evident joy at the prospect of being able to help the unhappy. "You see," she said, "I am strong. I have wonderful nerves : I am sure I can put my shoulder to many wheels and feel none the worse for it."

She became a nun : I saw nothing of her for a number of years. Then I met her a short time ago in extraordinary circumstances. I had been calling on an old acquaintance who is now an eminent surgeon. As I came out of the house a cab drew up at the door, and two nuns—one of whom was elderly and the other a year or two her junior—got out. The older of the two started when she saw me ; she uttered my name ; she paid the cabman ; then she said, turning to me, "I'll write to you." I walked home, and I was haunted by her face—it had changed as a woman's veil changes by

ON THE NEIGHBOUR'S BURDEN

much wearing ; that is to say, it had lost its clearness and crispness—but the real countenance behind it did not seem to have changed. The next morning I received her letter.

“ I have never forgotten,” she wrote, “ our old talks. You were quite right. I have done my best, but I do not believe that my shoulder—which is almost worn out by the pressure of other people’s wheels—has done any practical good. They would have arrived, or not arrived, at their journey’s end just the same—with or without my aid. My vanity would prefer to believe that I had been of infinite service. You saw me yesterday helping a sister out of a cab. She has to suffer surgery. I can imagine all that is passing in her mind, but I am powerless to help her. When the ordeal comes she must face it alone, bear it alone, and endure whatever may follow—alone. And this example is a very

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common example of one's humiliating ineffectiveness when the neighbour's hard hour is at its hardest. If you had ever been cynical, I should never have told you this. We both wished, however, to see facts squarely, and we both resolved not to deceive ourselves—no matter how much we deceived, unintentionally, other people. I do not deceive myself in this instance. Much of the sympathy that is offered is an excuse for domineering or a display of supposed moral superiority: much, on the other hand, is the purest fellow-feeling and compassion. Nevertheless, the neighbour's burden cannot be borne."

I decided, after reading this, that the writer was neither an unhappy nor a disappointed woman. She had merely accepted a truth which is forbidden till we smile upon it. Then it grows milder. It is useless to fume, to fuss, to clasp and unclasp one's hands, to pace the

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floor, to knit one's brows, to fret, to expostulate. All such natural demonstrations of anxiety ease you, no doubt, but they do not ease the afflicted neighbour. Your own burden, by force of pity, may grow to resemble his, but his will remain unaltered—not to be shared or lessened. To know this, and to comprehend it, is not the beginning of egoism, but the first seed of real unselfishness—an admission of one's limitations.

On the Romantic Style

ON THE ROMANTIC STYLE

I FEEL a longing often for that atmosphere, that philosophy, that attitude, those gestures, those sentiments, and those actions — above all, those actions which we call romantic. Is there no romance left in life? Or, was the thing we now call romance ever, at any time, alive? One is told much about its traditions, but religion, in spite of its traditions, is an eternal element in man. If romance, as it is understood at present, were either a natural state or a genuine instinct, no amount of traditions could kill it. I see that it

ON THE ROMANTIC STYLE

has been killed, and so I am urged to the conclusion that it had no supreme vitality in the first place. A few nights ago I attended the performance by some popular players of a famous romantic drama. The lady who represents the heroine was very pretty and ridiculous—the most delightful marionette conceivable. I could have watched her for hours: the charming face, the lovely black eyes, the helpless white hands, and the fingers covered with big rings, the brilliant clothes, the picturesque, amazing headdress—utterly unlike the sombre magnificent stillness of Velasquez, whose tragic art is so much admired, quoted, and compared with other arts in portraiture by people who have never been across the threshold of the galleries at Madrid. But Velasquez or no Velasquez, I adored the lady: she was a darling; I wanted to put her on my mantelpiece and dust her beautiful

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embroidered gown every morning, and cover it—and her—with Chinese silk every night. She murmured curious M'mms each time she spoke, and I did not care what she said so long as she said M—m—m first, and moved her splendid eyelashes up and down. I know she is a fine actress when she is not playing a romantic part, and if she were not a fine actress she could not have made herself such a priceless gem of a doll. She evidently said: "I am to be a physical impossibility—I will therefore be a mechanical triumph." And she succeeded. Oh, why can't I have that bewitching object (and her changes of costume in a velvet box with a silver key) for ever on my mantelpiece!

But let me come to the men. Were cloaks ever quite so scarlet before? did their wearers ever throw them around and about themselves with so much play? did swords ever stick out so far

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beneath long tattered mantles? were tattered mantles ever so curiously tattered? did hats ever stand so perkily on heads? did plumes ever curl with such determined curlings? did collars ever sit so high in the back, or fall, with such abandon, from noble throats? did human beings ever strut, ever bellow, ever attitudinise, ever “ha! ha!” and “ho! ho!” with such overpowering imbecility? did lovers ever talk in such periods? I cannot believe it. What is worse—for me, perhaps—I should be so sorry if I were obliged, by irrefutable evidence, to believe it.

Spain is acknowledged to be the original home of romance, and the Spanish, of all European people, have changed very little in the course of the centuries. They are the least theatrical, least self-conscious race in the world: to see the peculiar naturalness which we call child-like, we must study Spanish men and

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Spanish women. Their movements are quiet ; their faces are, for the most part, transparent—the character, either gentle or undisciplined, shines through : in speech, they are simple ; in feeling, they are not subtle, but, on the contrary, very definite ; their eyes are not given to flashing—they are usually steady and profound ; they are neither very merry nor very sad, but they are graciously serious. In their loves the women have much in common with Irish women. They are as faithful and they are less discerning—that is to say, they give a blind love and they are not witty in detecting the ironies—many of them hard—in all affection. They are domestic women who bring up large families and control small households ; they dress plainly ; they have few luxuries, and they are exceedingly pious in a matter-of-fact way. How unlike the heroines of romance ! The men are easily happy,

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easily gallant, and easily married. If they are quick-tempered, they are not swashbucklers; they are fond of children, and they are great admirers of beauty; they are abstemious eaters and drinkers; they are not eager for money; they delight in gardens and sunshine; they are not much given to talking; they smoke too much; they are, no doubt, unambitious; they are not dashing—they are, in fact, a little amateurish when, in small companies, they parade the streets, to gaze up at girls on balconies, or when in places of public amusement, they applaud their favourites—acrobats, for choice. They have a passion for acrobats and conjuring tricks. Women dancers are not popular—once away from Madrid, where the customs are cosmopolitan. But again, how different from our heroes of romance! Imagine a hero of romance patiently watching a cabbage grow out of his sombrero!

ON THE ROMANTIC STYLE

Imagine a hero of romance buying circus tickets for his wife and nine children ! Imagine a hero of romance taking them all home in a tramcar to a little dinner of vegetable soup, ham, and fruit ! As for the higher classes, the higher classes are precisely the same everywhere, and a Spanish grandee of the first rank might be an English duke of the old, old school sitting alone in his ancestral stronghold wondering at the new vagaries of society, or he might be one of the newest type of English aristocrat. In neither case would he resemble the romantic characters of romantic drama. Perhaps this is as well.

Nevertheless, I should like that priceless gem of a doll—she is modern and she represents an idea ; she's an adorable symbol of clap-trap, and if she is not in the least like a Velasquez portrait, it is because she is so truly of this century, and so surely a sign of these times. No

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man alive could put her, as she is, on canvas. Mere superficial impressionism could do her no justice. She is herself a triumph over all the difficulties of Nature.

On Intellectual Society

ON INTELLECTUAL SOCIETY

ONCE I was called distinctly cultured. My passion for literature and all the fine arts is known: I am a little proud of my library, and, to this day, I travel with pocket volumes of Catullus, Homer, Dante, Saint-Simon, and one or two others, in my port-manteau. I have read, and read, and read: I have views about architecture, ethnology, medical science, politics, and virtue. To my alarm—or is it to my relief?—I find that I can no longer discuss these profound subjects with the old zest: I prefer to hear why oaks won't

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grow in the east plantation, why the *chef* decided to postpone his marriage, why the Bletherings no longer smile at the Winterwolds, what Sir Charles said to the grocer, and how Mrs. Garing bore the news of Colonel Tottenham's engagement. It may be very trivial, but it is, at its pettiest, alive. And to be alive—even on a minute scale—is so much. Intellectual talk is all very well in its way, but it is mighty exhausting. A moment strikes when one can hear theories and criticisms no more: when long discussions of this or that book, this or that system of thought, excite terror and involve a nervous collapse: when the mere sight of a learned essay fills one with quakings, shakings, nausea: when the remarks of the tremendous Mr. X. on the enormous Mr., or Monsieur, or Herr, or Signor Y. do not seem to matter. Yet I love my books and my fine arts better than ever. I

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understand them better; but I can no longer talk about them: it would seem as futile as an incessant discourse on my best friends or my nearest relatives. So, when a well-meaning acquaintance asked me the other day whether I thought the younger Dumas had much in common with Euripides, and if the Creevey Papers did not remind me of the Memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz, I could no more: I said: "Not that! not that!" just as heroes say in melodrama: I owed to the astonished scholar that I would sooner pore over *Tit-Bits* and the *Referee* than hear a syllable about the French Impressionists, the Tendencies of Modern Spiritualism, or the Differences between the German and the English stage.

"Nature," said my acquaintance, "is taking her revenge. This is the result of overstudy."

Perhaps he was right, because I feel

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that I do no credit at all to my education, to my distinguished tutors, to my learned companions. But my most learned companions will forgive me if I confess that when we are all quite alone by ourselves, our conversation seldom turns on abstract ideas. We are scandal-mongers, we retail gossip, we tell yarns about the absent, we meet to hear the news, and we do not disappoint each other. If any one of us even murmured the name of Hegel, or Maeterlinck, or D'Annunzio, or even Leopardi (for a change), I think he would soon wish he had not spoken. The wearisomeness of so-called intellectual prattle is a cause of half the depression we find among literary people. They will seldom be natural: *il faut se faire valoir* is a first principle in cultured circles: and on the accomplished creatures go: if one is mad enough to refer to a new book, lo! all the brows are knit; Aristotle and Schopen-

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hauer, the *Revue des deux Mondes*, and Walter Pater are hurled at one's bewildered brain. "But surely——" "Is it finite?" "Did Browning not say it as well?" "Has it never been said quite so piteously before?" these fly around one's head; few are equal to the strain. As for me, I have conversation endings to match chess openings. A great favourite in endings is this: "Beyond question, Mullins is too delightful." Mullins is my generic name for the genius of the second. Sometimes, if I am still comparatively animated, I go further, and add: "Mullins deserves all that is said of him. I love Mullins."

Such candour, however, will provoke ill-will. I have known a whole company turn round and declare that "Poor Mullins has had his vogue." I persist, "All that was ever good in Mullins remains good. Therefore, I will love my Mullins."

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The joke is that they do not wish me to love Mullins. They wish me to say those things against his, or her, work which they secretly think. When I remember the useless battles I have fought for many a Mullins, I reproach myself for the wanton waste of energy. How much wiser it is to live peaceably either among the deeply learned—who are always simple—or the healthy illiterate—who are simple also.

I have heard of a lady of rare talents who married what is called an “outdoors” man. She was a charming lady, with all the insidious sympathetic grace of a born artist, and many of the usual flesh and blood attractions. But she went, accompanied by the “outdoors” man (otherwise the slave of the lamp), to queer, picturesque, insanitary towns in Greece, where long-haired experts were constantly finding the lost fragments of Æschylus. The erudition of these

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individuals at first dazzled the "outdoors" man: then he became envious: then morose: then bored: now he is dangerously ill. Intellectual conversation has driven him frantic. When I last heard of him, however, he was digging in the sand with a professor of astronomy. They pretended that they were amusing the professor's children. I believe myself that the children were trying to relieve the anguish of two utterly weary men. Within the house the lady with the rare talents was painting a sunset, while a gentleman of languid appearance was playing "marvellous" bits from Palestrina on a mandoline—of all instruments. There are, I remember, many, many mansions in Paradise.

On Leap Year

ON LEAP YEAR

ONE of my friends, an admiral's widow, gives me, every Saturday, a summary of her week's study of the *Daily Mail*. A strange question, therefore, has been haunting me for some weeks :

Should girls propose ?

I have a great reverence for youth, but there seems to be some conspiracy in the very air to rob young women of the present day of all their charm. Is it true that millions every morning seriously consider whether men are too timid to suggest marriage ? Am I to believe that

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any girl in her senses could persuade herself that a man who showed the least cowardice in wooing would be worth consideration as a husband? Do these people who write apologies for backward or unwilling lovers realise at all what marriage means, or the irreparable harm they work in unformed minds by lowering the average standard of common manliness? Already in this small parish, I observe a new light gleaming in many eyes which were once very gentle and submissive. Great hulking fellows who work on stock farms are being treated as though they were delicate flowers, capricious zephyrs, sensitive plants, or moping love-birds; the Master of the Hounds (who is over six feet in height and a very fair specimen of English manhood) is regarded as a Sèvres statuette; ladies humour him; he is no musician, but their attitude toward him is, as it were, that of those who turn over the leaves for a

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player on some instrument. The few officers who are stationed near our county town receive odd treatment, which is based apparently, on the assumption that they are frail and bashful. If a subaltern declines an invitation to a boring dinner, his refusal is taken with smiles of indulgence. Mama and the daughters pat his hand—I might almost say his cheek—they stroke his arm (not as Pallas Athene stroked the arm of Odysseus, but rather as a kind cat caresses a pouting kitten); they behave, in fact, as the knights of old in romance behaved toward petulant, shrinking beauties. This grim truth—the subaltern prefers to miss their dinner party—is far from their suspicion; so, with the best motives, they pile encouragement on encouragement till it looks less like hospitality than persecution. Last year, the unmarried men or widowers of our small circle paid calls, lent books, entertained a little, dined out and danced

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a little, attended Bazaars, Flower Shows, Cattle Sales, Race Meetings, Political Meetings, and Garden Parties; did their best, in fact, to exchange neighbourly civilities and join in the slow whirl, such as it was, of parochial affairs. Now all this is changed. Girls who were formerly prudent have become foolish, and women who were formerly agreeable companions have developed into dragoons. One fears them; one avoids them; one dreads the gift of their sympathy, and it would be suicide to offer it. Now this is clearly wrong. One should always be willing, at least, to meet any woman—of any age or any type of understanding (I say nothing about looks because it is a deep-set notion of mine that a good appearance in a member of either sex, depends wholly on the individual observer—not on the individual observed). I am not a coxcomb; my unmarried friends (among men) are not vain, but we begin to feel that we

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are being much pitied because we are so desolate of self-confidence that we dare not tell our loves. We could tell our loves easily enough if we had them; nay, more, we should enjoy telling them; the fact is, we are not in love, and we do not wish to marry. Most of us have had our stories—long ago; some of us are inexpressibly thankful that they never grew beyond the story-stage; some of us have old memories which cannot be displaced in favour of new hopes; some of us have neither memories nor hopes. But what is this strange fever in the air with regard to marriage? Who pairs the birds of the trees? Who badgers the lion? Who bores the elephant? Who writes essays on the nervousness of the field-mouse? Who would start a correspondence on bachelors in the beetle tribe? If we once allow—even for argument's sake—that it is for women to arrange the marriages, all social life is doomed to

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destruction. Men driven into a corner use their strength, hit hard, and get out into the open as soon as possible. They are never coy, and I fear they are not tactful when their freedom is at stake. The most timorous male will find the strength to say "No"—when he receives an unwelcome proposal. And a woman's proposal could never be welcome. As for Queens and Ruling Princesses, their case is hard. It is so hard that I doubt all the sacred legends on the subject. And my prayer is that no well-meaning spinster, sustained by pretty anecdotes of Queens, Prince Consorts, and roses, will offer our octogenarian retired Indian Judge a bunch of honeysuckle and myrtle. He will not like it, and she will feel hurt, eventually.

**On Art
by the Inch**

ON ART BY THE INCH

DURING early Victorian days much was made, in humour dealing with literary people, of the piteous penny-a-liner. These jokes are now obsolete, and the single faintly amusing thought one could now connect with them would depend on the vulgarity of one's own feelings on the subject of small as opposed to large means. For no one now would think the shilling-a-liner, the five-shilling-a-liner, or the guinea-a-liner in the least funny, or, in any sense, a reproach to the fine profession of Letters. At the present time every English writer,

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whether distinguished or popular or obscure, is paid by the word—his fee is so much per thousand words. It is, therefore, to his interest and bodily well-being to pad, to spin out, to forget every elementary rule of good prose writing or clear thinking; to go on telling the tiresome loves of one Harry and one Sylvia at greater length than all the historical tragedies of Shakespeare combined; to go on and on detailing notes on some system of philosophy, some municipal suggestion for the public good, some political question, some volume of verse, some biography, some little play, some long opera, till the subject is wholly lost in the commentary. Voltaire's most famous articles in the *Encyclopædia* are not half so long as the average leader dealing, for the fiftieth time, with the Mid-Herts Election. The multiplication of unnecessary words—each representing a bit of money—is a national calamity.

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It has affected the House of Commons, the Law Courts, the transactions of all business, public or private, the composition of every class of book, the newspapers, and, finally, the mind of the race. Dictated letters are seldom coherent; speeches are rarely tolerable; our most accomplished writers torment themselves to make five hundred useless sentences as effective as one pointed sentence, and twenty chapters do the duty of a paragraph. In art every line should be alive, and in speech, whether domestic, commercial, or rhetorical, every remark should convey a direct notion—otherwise it may be called dead. But what do we find? People think their indolent, valueless, untested, and unconsidered thoughts aloud; no child is ever taught how to control his mental processes; no man is ever asked to put his ideas into concise form. If he has any reputation he will be asked what his terms are for his

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vocabulary. If the Editor and Publisher cannot afford his best examples of the verbose, they will content themselves with the most tedious thing he can manage "up to two or three thousand" conjunctions, adverbs, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, and nouns arranged in grammatical order. At this moment I am endeavouring to read an anecdote about some individuals on a farm, but the book seems longer than any one of the four volumes dealing with *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The anecdote has interest, novelty, pathos, a certain humour, a certain value; it is told, however, in a style that is infinitely slower than life; I would far sooner take a sea voyage to the ranche and see the individuals for myself than swallow so many, many pages of "scenery," "soliloquies," "dialogue," "local colour," "moralising," "psychological analyses," and mere words by the hundred.

ON ART BY THE INCH

We are told that Dumas was paid by the line; hence his invention of the dialogue-form which English authors now carry to such a lamentable, if excusable pitch:

“How now?”

“Who spoke?”

“No friend!”

“What then?”

“To reply would be to confess!”

“Your readiness betrays you.”

“Every one, under a domino, has the courage to be witty.”

“But not every one, in spite of a domino, is evidently a Queen!”

Ten pounds would not be too much for the above fooling attached to an advertised signature; ten pence, on the old system, would be its lowest value; on the new system it would represent, signed by a very popular author, rather less than ten shillings. Let us imagine, however, that the very popular author

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decided to cast the sense of the above conversation into the following form :

“The stranger, who showed all the common audacity which the meekest can display under the cover of a disguise, was not able to hide the uncommon distinction of her natural bearing.”

This old fad, or whim, on the author's part would cost him, as a ratepayer, a human being, and a consumer of bread, about one shilling and twopence.

I have a suggestion, therefore, to make to stationers. Let them prepare manuscript books for authors arranged as telegraph forms—with a proper space marked off for each word. It would be a tangible incitement to pot-boiling—a silent secretary ticking one's precious “ands,” “buts,” “moreovers,” and “yets.”

As for art or literature, do they matter? I had a friend who wrote a serial novel with such preposterous care

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that the proprietors reduced its price by four hundred pounds. They found no fault with the novel, and if the author would have ruined it by adding irrelevant twaddle, he would have been a richer man by four hundred pounds than he is to-day. But I believe he is on the right track. I foresee a slump in the reckless manufacture of printed unidea'd pages. It is the presentment of the idea—not the use of the dictionary—which is valuable.

**On the
Self-sufficient**

ON THE SELF-SUFFICIENT

“CARDINAL NEWMAN,” writes Mozley, “filled up his whole time, taxed his whole strength, and occupied his whole future. He reduced retrospection to very narrow compass, to a few faces, to flowers on a bank or a wall, to a fragrance or a sound. He never took solitary walks if he could help it. . . He would not be alone and left to his own thoughts when he was neither studying, nor writing, nor praying.” He was buried by the side of his closest friend ; of all great modern authors he has written with the most

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reserve and yet the most intensity on human affection. Now, do these facts square with the vulgar idea of a recluse, or a saint, or a philosopher, or a deeply earnest person? A deeply earnest person is supposed to say to himself—"My mind to me a kingdom is!" he is "never less alone than when alone!" he is absorbed in his own meditations, entranced by his own visions, sustained by his own profundity: he will gladly forsake his brilliant or tender neighbour for the perfect companionship of his own unmitigated egoism. It happens, however, that the really earnest person is the least willing of men to be thrown upon his moods, his emotions, or his thoughts: as a rule, his studies are a refuge, and his work is an anodyne: when he is tired, or ill, or so situated that work is out of the question, his one need is sleep or some distraction. A self-sufficient soul—if there be, in truth,

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such a soul—is a diseased soul incurably suffering from vanity and incapable of deep feeling. Those who have ever been obliged to set their thoughts, whether idle or perplexing, in order, have one desire only—to keep the mind employed on impersonal themes. When a man refuses, even under medical advice, to take what is known as a rest cure, it is not because he is restless, unhappy, or dependent on others, but because he is too well balanced to stand, as he was never meant to stand, absolutely alone. The imperative need of companionship during hours of recreation does not deny the equally imperative need of solitude during hours, weeks, possibly months, of intellectual work. Manual labour is often better done in company—especially if a number are labouring together: industry is infectious: there is magnetism in the atmosphere of a large workshop full of toilers. But for writing,

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or painting, or scholarship, or musical composition, one must be, for the greater part of the time, in unbroken quietude; a real person, no matter how sympathetic, will make one's imagination seem weak, and all the creatures of fancy rather ineffective. There are a few rare men and women in whose presence it is possible to paint or write or think without restraint; they have the gift of becoming so absorbed in their own thoughts that they can retire, at any time, spiritually if not physically, to what is called a world of their own. That is to say, their inquisitiveness, or indolence, or fussiness, or moodiness, or inconsequence does not infect the surrounding moral atmosphere and fill it with exasperating whispers. But men and women of this uncommon type are generally too much occupied themselves to sit often in the studios or libraries of other people: if they are perfect companions to the weary

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or the hard-pressed it is because they know, by experience, what the weary or the hard-pressed cannot bear. In the same way, people who have suffered bodily anguish are the least demonstrative, the most consoling, in a sick-room: they are neither solicitous nor artificially sanguine: they know what is passing in a patient's mind. A doctor or a nurse who has never been ill is never quite sound in his or her judgment: they misread symptoms and ignore the secret springs of a main distress. Let me return, however, to those who are supposed to be self-sufficient. How do they live their lives? On consideration, it will be found that they are spent in day dreams, in castle-building, in the playing, for their own benefit, of fine parts, in the nourishment of some fixed idea, some grievance, or some form of vanity. There is no heroism, or turpitude, of

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which they are not capable in imagination and unobserved, but the other side of the existence is pure sham. The nominally self-sufficient become, less by choice than necessity, astonishing dissemblers the moment they confront human beings or find themselves in some actual situation. One cannot believe such people: one must not trust such people: one may understand them and love them, but one must never put the smallest faith in them. And why not? are they malicious? are they vicious? are they irresponsible? No: they are merely incomplete. To be self-sufficient is to be undeveloped: the higher the intelligence the stronger its need of association with other intelligences: the more vigorous the animal, the more oppressive is the melancholy of continuous solitude. The people who perish under loneliness are not the weak in mind and body—not the sickly, but the

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strong and the sane. Their very strength and their very sanity make, failing the legitimate struggle with outside influence, for self-destruction.

**On
Vexations**



ON VEXATIONS

THE other day I read of a recluse who had carved on the oak mantelpiece of his library this sentence: "I am an old man now: I've had lots of trouble, and most of it never happened."

There is strangeness, yet more truth than strangeness, in that confession. We are not told that all the trouble never happened, but that most of it never happened. The meaning, beyond doubt, is that no matter how tragic actual events may be, they are rare in comparison with those distressing states of mind and soul which occur daily, which

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form the perpetual moral atmosphere of certain individuals, which are called matters of temperament by the unimaginative, which are known by spiritual and all other doctors of experience to be for ever incurable.

A well-known modern French critic has just said that the difference between the drama of England and the drama of other nations lies in the great fact that the Anglo-Saxon public wish to hear whether Edwin marries Angelina, while Europeans elsewhere wish to know the moral effects of the marrying, or the not marrying, on the souls of the symbolic pair. What, in truth, does Edwin really think and feel ! What, in the silence of her heart, does Angelina brood over or rejoice at ? What, to sum up, were the troubles that never happened ? Mr. Pinero, among dramatists who are obliged to consider the peculiarities of Anglo-Saxon play-goers, has tried his utmost to bring psychology—

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which is to the play what the soul is to the body—into his serious works : he has tried to tell more than the bald facts and clipped dialogue of a situation : he has sought for the eternal lyrical note under the feeble *patois* : he has endeavoured to give, not a verbatim conversation between some wretched pair on a particular afternoon, but to compose *the* scene between the broken-hearted of all times. Such aims are high : a little group, in many centuries, against the whole world, have succeeded in hitting artistic perfection, but a man who has the courage to take even a wisp of psychological truth into the small parlour of a London theatrical manager is a man who is by no means unconscious that he is writing rather to satisfy his own sense than to impress those who cast respectful glances toward the agents of trick-wrestlers and prodigious children. It is wrong to maintain, however, that the English

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mind is not given to introspection or the analysis of moral crises. It analyses without method and without impartiality, but it is shrewd enough to be fully sentient of its own misery or its own satisfaction: it seems to say to itself what a plain-speaking invalid once said to his expert physicians: "I don't know what you call pain or what I have got, but it hurts me to move, and I cannot live. That ends it," and so speaking, he met death as a merciful deliverance from agony and the specialists. "I don't know what I have got" is a variation on that poignant slang of onlookers—"He doesn't know what has struck him." The worst is that the observer himself is too often in the dark also: if he knew what had "struck" the sufferer, he might be more sympathetic, less vulgarly inquisitive: less brittle as a friend: more profound as a philosopher: infinitely more civilised as a human being.

ON VEXATIONS

One striking illustration of the ill-breeding of the average Anglo-Saxon attitude toward psychology has been curiously displayed in a number of the criticisms, professional and otherwise, passed on a recent production of Mr. Gilbert Murray's superb translation of the *Hippolytus*. When the wrath of a goddess, rather than a supper at a fashionable restaurant, is offered as the real cause of a tragic love, humanity should feel gratitude for the magnificence of such a defence. The squalor of the usual flirtation is immediately relieved: and we have the dignity of an afflicted soul as opposed to the humiliation of the fowls of the poultry-yard. Humanity has responded for several centuries to the truth of Euripides, but the manner of the moment in England is in favour of tittering. One must titter: one must try, somehow, to be modern: one must compare Phædra and Hippolytus with quite

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nice people we have met who, on the one hand, have never heard of Aphrodite, and, on the other, cannot imagine an over-mastering instinct for chastity : one takes one's self—not other persons—seriously : one must finish as one begins—one must titter. If this tittering arose from an untamable sense of humour, one might forgive it while one deplored its inappropriate manifestation ; but humour cries till it laughs—it never titters. Tittering comes from the want of self-confidence, or mere flippancy : most often, however, from want of self-confidence, a nervousness.

If indeed the supper at the expensive or at the cheap eating-house were all—(and let the supper stand for the whole domestic *tracas*)—the titter is a noble effort to smile kindly at the contemptible. But the supper is not all : the wrath of the god or the goddess is for ever present. Mr. Gilbert, in his *Fairy's Dilemma*, calls them Rosebud and Alcohol : he, as

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a genial satirist, shows them at work, driving a brave man to play the brutal clown and a sensitive woman to pirouette, in anguish, for the mob—a touch or two more and Mr. Gilbert's comedy would be painful. And it is not always Venus who is offended; Juno may be injured: Neptune takes his revenge: Jupiter and Mars are fierce in their resentments: there are so many gods and goddesses to appease. And they are ever moving and making, now intensifying, and now soothing, the troubles that never happened—the events which, happening, are remembered as dreams.

**On a Great
Little Masterpiece**



ON A GREAT LITTLE MASTERPIECE

HENRY BECQUE—the author of *La Parisienne*—saw life as Flaubert saw it, but he had, what Flaubert lacked, the dramatic instinct. The construction of *La Parisienne* is perfect in its rhythm; from the first line until the last there is not a word which does not illuminate the whole, which is not indispensable to the whole, which is not living, and which is not true. The plot is better than any of the tortured inventions which pass for problems—it is a common case presented by a man who was as fearless as Molière in his

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exposition of the human heart. He knew, as Molière knew, and Flaubert knew, and Fielding knew, that there are no problems, and that, till death intervenes in the affairs of all the parties concerned, there is no last act on earth for any set of situations. *La Parisienne*, briefly, is the given sum total of all the plays and novels which have misinformed the inexperienced of the Christian world for the last hundred years or so.

We are given a woman and three men. The woman (Clotilde) is not a great beauty, not a great social figure: she is an ordinary burgess of moderate means and charm. The men are undistinguished, plain, known only to a very small circle, and important only to themselves and God. Clotilde is married, childless, good-natured, and full of vitality; her good nature is constant, and it is at once her redeeming gift and her source of weakness. The husband is anxious to

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get on in his own cramped way, he is wholly satisfied with Clotilde, who is charming to him: who encourages him when he is worried about his inconsiderable career: who makes his house so pleasant that he hates going out.

"I am so bad-tempered to-day," he says, at one point, "that I am only fit to be with you."

Clotilde has a lover—her own and her husband's best friend. The lover, a Monsieur Lafont, is idle; he has, of course, nothing to occupy his time or his mind; one infers that he inherited from most respectable, hard-working parents, a regular income, and, with it, a domestic temperament. He adores Clotilde, yet he knows her dangerous disposition—not as a man of the world would know her—but because his love has given him an instinct. She is not to be trusted, he is ever suspicious, ever on the rack of jealousy, and ever

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justified in his worse fears. She pretends to find his want of confidence atrocious, an insult, brutal, detestable, and so forth; they have painful scenes, in which she tells the truth ironically, because she is not a willing liar (another touch of genius on Becque's part), and the lover, pretending to take her confession for sarcasm, feels that she is, nevertheless, speaking, under cover, realities. She has another lover, a younger man, better-looking, a sportsman, a man who has a fashionable mother—in modern English middle-class circles he would be called "smart." The unhappy Clotilde beholds in this last the heroic type of her sentimental dreams and her novels of false romance. According to the measure of her capacity she falls at last in love. She, all along, has been the wonder and the marvel and the pride of her husband's life and Lafont's life; the position is at last reversed, she is

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the obscure person whom some brilliant being deigns to honour with a few odd moments and a sham passion. The affair lasts five months. The man goes off to his collection of guns and his sport at his mother's country seat. We are given the last interview only. It is enough—one line more and it would have been too much. The man's insolent politeness; his cold stare; his anxiety to catch his train; his half-touch of a contemptuous affection—as though he were patting the neck of a cheap hired horse who had answered his purpose well enough; the woman's mortification; her effort to keep her dignity; her consciousness that she has placed herself, beyond hope, in the wrong and in the dust; her disappointment in her hero, who looked the part but did not play it—it is all there in one short agonising conversation. He speaks again of his train; the unsuspecting husband

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escorts him out ; Lafont, who has been watching his moment for the whole five months, comes back to the house ; and the comedy ends as it began—with the difference that Lafont's jealousy has been justified, and Clotilde's eyes have lost their roving defiance. Lafont talks and she listens patiently. In the first act she talks feverishly and Lafont listens. The change is profound. The male dominates—as he ought and as he always does when the woman forgets that she may excel in the graces but never in a struggle against fixed laws. The curtain falls on a subdued conciliatory Clotilde, grateful for a refuge and an affection which Lafont himself tells her is not found every day. Lafont is a character of such consummate sincerity that one likes him and is sorry for him. He may be a sinner, but he knows how to love ; he has no attitudes, no rhetoric, no figure, and no talent for

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love-making. He is, however, a man, and he suffers. M. Antoine's performance in the part was the finest creation, of its kind, I have ever seen—a study of the ordinary being without self-knowledge, or self-consciousness, or self-discipline, who blurts out, in the meagre vocabulary at his command, as much of his emotion as he can ever express. The blinking, tearless eyes, the husky voice, the despair of a jealousy which is as much sorrow as pity, and as much tenderness as covetousness, are shown as they have never been shown in any picturesque *Othello*.

There are critics who, mistaking the situation for the philosophy, have called this piece immoral. One would as soon call *Georges Dandin* or *Tom Jones* immoral. A true book and a true play cannot be otherwise than moral. It is the false picture—no matter how pretty—which makes for immorality.

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Newman says, in speaking of another kind of emotion than the caprices of men and women for each other—indulgence in religious privileges:

“ Nothing lasts, nothing keeps incorrupt and pure, which comes of mere feeling ; feelings die like spring flowers, and are fit only to be cast into the oven. Persons thus circumstanced will find their religion fail them in time ; a revulsion of mind will ensue. They will feel a violent distaste for what pleased them before, a sickness and weariness of mind, or even an enmity towards it, or a great disappointment, or a confusion and perplexity and despondence. Before honour is humility, sowing in tears before reaping in joy, pain before pleasure, duty before privilege.”

This touching passage—in which a stern warning is softened by loving-kindness into an appeal—could be placed as a preface to *La Parisienne* and

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to all modern studies of the various forms under which sentimentality and hysteria manifest themselves. People are sincere enough—it is their education which is unreal and deceptive. The wretched Clotilde, encouraged or driven by bad advisers into an unsuitable marriage, seeking, by the light of corrupt literature, for an ideal, and finding, by the pitilessness of justice, an egoism as callous as her own, is a victim rather than an example of a dishonest ethical system. One cannot cheat Nature; her legislation for drones and those who want the joy, without the woe, of living is terrible in its severity. And she is most terrible in her laws on all relations between the sexes. If one could drive every religious prejudice out of the world, Nature, with her cruelty unhallowed, would still remain. Newman's sermons and Becque's comedies are on the same shelf in my bookcase.

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On Disreputable Dulness

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ON DISREPUTABLE DULNESS

OUIDA (Louise de la Ramée), one of the few women writers of genius, has declared a number of true things which are so terribly true that she has never been able to please either the self-deceived or the deceivers of others—in fact, the genteel and the hypocrites. The genteel cannot believe that people are so treacherous, so weak, so subtle, or, at moments, so noble as she paints them ; the hypocrites are dismayed at her revelations of human character. But she is, and she will remain, a psychologist of extraordinary gifts—too scornful perhaps in

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her attitude; perhaps too vehement in her language; often inconsistent in her judgment; still, sincerity and the artist's soul are in every book she has signed. I was re-reading one of her famous novels—*Friendship*—when I came upon the following: “*What weariness will men endure if only it be not in the name of virtue!*”

The passage preceding this exclamation describes an evening spent by Prince Ioris and his “great friend,” Lady Joan Challoner, at a masquerade ball:

“*Ioris sighed this evening as he fastened her mask behind her ears and went down with her into the dingy whirlpool. He was so tired of it all. The thin disguises, the stupid jokes, the commonplace intrigues, the coarse pretence of deceiving and being deceived, the noise, the uproar, the shrill cries, the headlong dances—they had grown so tiresome. He had laughed his lightest and waltzed his wildest in*

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other years—but he was tired of it all—very tired—now as he walked about among the screaming crowd, and exchanged the rapid phrases of custom, with dominoes that were as well known to him as though he had met them in broad day ; and heard the resonant voice of his empress ring loud above the music in merciless speech and worn-out jibes ; and lighted her cigarettes and carried her fan, and got her claret-cup, and thought how long the night was—the boisterous, empty, joyless, senseless night, through which, all the while, he had to laugh and be ready with answer, and look amused, and turn an airy compliment, and join in all the mirth, and never show a yawn, but wait on duty till the kindly sun should rise, and so release him. What weariness will men endure if only it be not in the name of virtue ! ”

The husband of the lady was at home, comfortably sleeping.

One is told so much by amateurs of

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immorality about the dreary humdrum of virtue that it is refreshing to find a picture of the more tedious humdrum of vice. Dulness is a quality in the individual; if there are dull matrons there is also an infinite crowd of very dull wantons; there are dull villains as well as dull patterns of propriety; if sermons can be dull, comedies can be much duller. It is not the sin which makes the sinner attractive, nor the band which makes an occasion lively; many sinners are sad bores, and I have often seen the white Hungarians playing and swaying with the madness of musicians to persons as irresponsive as scooped cocoa-nuts on sticks. On some occasions they have been persons of importance and eminent respectability; on other occasions, they have been persons who hoped to be considered rather shocking, but no tunes ever composed could make any of them really joyous, or even cheerful.

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When a virtuous woman is tedious, she is not tedious because she is chaste, but because she is unimaginative or mentally stupid, and when an immoral woman is brilliant, she is not brilliant because she is immoral, but because she happens to have brains. Saint Teresa was more brilliant than Catherine of Russia; and Isabella of Castille—more beautiful than Mary Stuart and better loved—was incomparably her superior in statesmanship. But all four are eternally interesting.

Actresses, ever chosen as the types of gay romance or romantic woe, are here and there only, a couple in fifty years or so, above the average female as a companion. It is notorious that men grow more rapidly tired of actresses and the professionally light-hearted—whether they follow them or marry them—than they ever do of women who lead quiet lives. And the reason for this fickleness lies not in the actress as an artist too

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self-absorbed—a real artist is never a bore—but in the actress as an ordinary being who, when she is not playing a part, is vainer than her sisters and less certain of her feelings.

I have watched many an adventurous couple and small party at seaside and river towns; the desire, nay, a positive ache for rapture is always in their eyes, but disappointment is in the atmosphere. I have seen, too, many an adventurous couple or small party who were having, unmistakably, as good a time as the orthodox. The good time, however, was in their own temperaments—not in the circumstances. And these evidences of the tyranny of character bring me to the conclusion that it is an enormous and wicked blunder to put in moral pictures all the excitement and gaiety where dissipation is, and, all the melancholy and tedium where wisdom is supposed to be. Young people, as a rule, are warned

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against many places of amusement, not because they are dull, which is the case, but because they are improper. And youth at once forms the idea that the improprieties and irregularities are forbidden because of their enchantment and their undying delight. Those who have been allowed most liberty in roving know better. But one reason why novelists and playwrights frequently rely upon their wicked characters and vicious situations for their strong points is because it is so much easier to study the cheap, the common, and the free than the reserved, the sacred, and the everlasting. For one hundred authors who can draw, with a certain success, a person of either sex without prejudices, and hit you off a scoundrel or a courtesan, there is not one who can draw an ordinary human being who faces with fixed principles the usual temptations, and make him, or her, even endurable, far less alive.



The Comic Note



THE COMIC NOTE

I DO not think many could have wondered about the general significance of the term "Comic Note." "A comic note—a tragic note"—we find both terms constantly employed in the criticisms of dramatic performances and in the reviews of fiction and verse.

So much then for its literary employment, but I will try to illustrate it still further by an anecdote I heard this morning about perhaps the most eminent surgeon in England.

He objected to a certain candidate for a post under him on the following score :

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“He is an affected ass,” said he; “when he takes up the forceps, he curls his little finger!”

Now that assistant, in fact, struck the comic note. It was a false movement, and an inappropriate one, and in rejecting his services the great surgeon was acting on a sound instinct.

Thus, a comic note is not infrequently struck in some of our most serious productions, and we have all heard ripples of ill-suppressed laughter or giggling run through an entire audience during some scene of intentional pathos.

Now, I believe I have traced this tittering to the want of dignity in many impersonations. And by dignity I do not mean pomposity, which is, of course, grotesque, and I do not mean what is called “a presence,” and I do not mean “the grand manner.” I shall make myself clearer by saying that many children possess it, if they have not been

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over-trained, and all animals, which have not been domesticated, possess it. I do not profess to have studied the wild beast at close quarters in his home life, but I always make a point of observing the caged beasts of every great city, and the difference between the dignity of these captives, even in imprisonment, and the dreadful humiliation of animals trained for the circus and music-hall is, to me not only marked, but extremely painful. A caged lion is superb; a tame lion beating a drum or rolling an empty barrel round the stage is a degrading spectacle—in fact, undignified. And in the same way I feel it undignified when a human being of good intelligence, appearance, and gifts, is brought to think, by a false system of art, that he must play down—against his convictions—to a large, mixed crowd; this is an insult to the large, mixed crowd, and this is why they titter.

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It may seem, at first, a paradox to you if I say that many so-called low comedians possess this dignity which I want you to consider, and, although the house is often convulsed with laughter at their absurdities, it is legitimate laughter—it is not a guffaw. A very conspicuous example of this quality is in Dan Leno, who, because of his extraordinary naturalness, never seems to degrade humanity. I often think that but for his disguises, which are studiously preposterous, he would more often make us weep than shout. Of course, this association of dignity with humour goes back to the original idea of the Clown, or Pierrot. Pierrot is always terribly in earnest: he suffers; he is made a fool of; he brings many of his troubles upon himself; he is a type of heaven-born imbecile, and it is his dress and artificially whitened face alone which give us the charter to take his difficulties as a joke.

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When we come to the impersonations in so-called tragedy and high comedy and serious drama—when the make-up is intended to be impressive, and the dresses are most elaborately designed with an eye to all that is picturesque and portentous, either the language put into the player's mouth or the player's own demeanour are so deficient in right feeling, that, while we restrain the outward expression of our amusement, we move uneasily and wonder whether the age is become flippant, or we ourselves are out of touch with these enormous emotions. Then, just as this doubt enters our heads, the comic note is struck unexpectedly and absurdly. We don't always call it comic—we call it false; the author is attacked—the actor, if he is not popular, is very much blamed. I think it wrong to blame anyone. All the modern traditions of the English stage are against the realisation of life as

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a very natural affair. If you give an emotional part to any intelligent actor or actress, they begin to think out the most elaborate business: they invent most ingenious tricks in the way of expression, gesture, and attitude. They want ten lines where as many words would be, perhaps, too much, and it is hard to convince the average stage-manager that the greatest and most terrible moments in experience are essentially untheatrical.

Frederick the Great was ardently fond of the drama, and, while he had the keenest appreciation for satire, he liked to lose himself, or be reminded of his own experiences, in watching what we should call a sensational play. "But," he writes, in one of his private letters, "the moment any actor over-acts and allows his art to stifle naturalness, I become chilled to the bone, I lose all interest, and I am no longer moved by the most pathetic situation." Now

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Frederick had lived all his life in an atmosphere of highly-charged emotions; no one will deny that his knowledge of the human heart under all conditions, strains, reverses, and passions, must have been altogether supreme. Yet he insists on simplicity—quietude even. A critic might reply that an ordinary patron of the drama has not the vast experience of Frederick the Great, and therefore he prefers exaggeration; he cannot be reached unless the performer indulges in really extravagant gestures and rhetoric. Here I would venture to disagree with such a critic. I grant that we have not all great experience, but we all have certain instincts for what is comic. We find this sense of the ridiculous very strong in many children, who can have no experience of the great passions which agitate mankind, and I have often observed them stifling their laughter during the efforts of some popular tragic actor

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or actress in a very strong third act. In other words, they detect, in their innocence, the burlesque of the human soul.

I am not pleading now for what is called realism, because the word realism has become almost exclusively associated with everything that is squalid. To call any work of art realistic is another expression for dismissing it as repulsive and ignominious. People are afraid of studies of so-called humble life or poor life, because they might be disagreeable. I quarrel with this entirely, and I deny that poor surroundings detract from the dignity—I am using the word pretty often—of the individual. The things that are undignified are matters of the soul, they are not matters of the environment, and this is why gorgeous mountings, dresses, slow music, and the really splendid effects of the scene-painter's art, as we see them nowadays, only serve to bring out the inadequacy of many

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performances which are intended to be heroic. And, before I go any farther, I hope you will all understand that I am attacking current ideas with regard to acting; I am not attacking individuals. English actors and actresses of the first rank compare with the actors and actresses of any other nation, but they have to contend against traditions which do not exist in any other country. They are the slaves of some secret body of conventions, which they dislike as much as I dislike them, and most of you dislike them; nevertheless, they regard them as unalterable. It is not too much to say that some of our most distinguished artists have zealously forced themselves to appear in plays which they are far too intelligent to think plausible, and to depend upon tricks in the creation of their own rôles which they are too well-informed to imagine could be acceptable to reasonable beings.

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I have often questioned friends of mine—clergy, soldiers, members of the legal and other professions, who see, of course, much more of the effects of actual emotion than any one individual in an ordinary career can ever hope to see—about what are called “big situations,” and I assure you, that they all subscribe to the criticism of Frederick the Great, and I could give you some extraordinary overwhelming evidence to prove the quietness of the human being under the most terrible and tragic strains—and this is without reference to class or education or temperament.

I want to dwell particularly upon this last point of class, education and temperament, because we all know that the manners of those who are too exalted for correction, in common with those who are too humble to be trained, are remarkable for the want of self-discipline. An eminent statesman once remarked in a

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former century that certain exhibitions of feeling were possible only to empresses and pauper fish-hags. But, in the many intervening classes between these two extremes, we all know that certain kinds of education make for self-restraint, and other kinds make for an untrammelled display of feeling and thought which it is the habit to call vulgar. I can but speak from my own observation, and I have noticed sublime examples of self-command and dignity among the obscure and the uneducated, whereas the most highly educated can be violent in their tempers, gross in their language, and undisciplined in all their actions. These things are a matter of constitution—what I might call fibre. Beyond doubt, certain temperaments have less self-control than others, and indulge in outward signs of emotion which are acknowledged to be effective, and possibly

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necessary, upon the stage. Still, this much is certain—and there is no exception to the rule—in moments of acute feeling, no one is in the very smallest degree, in spite of any peculiarity of dress or appearance or circumstances, comic. There is a terrible simplicity in any shock which is strong enough to overpower our self-consciousness. But it must overpower the self-consciousness, and that is exactly where these elaborate studies of the stage fail. We are not carried away; we notice the cleverness when we ought to have lost ourselves in the emotion. If people are really moved, whether in themselves as sufferers or as onlookers, they are entirely unconscious of what they are saying or doing.

But it might be objected by playwrights that a drama about well-behaved, wholly sane, reserved, and fastidious natures would be no drama at all. I

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confess very little would be done ; there would only be very long thinking parts. We should see the revival of the soliloquy in an aggravated form. We should soon have no dialogue at all. Well, I am not so sure, in many cases, that would not be a gain. It would rid us of this awful fear which haunts the composer of problems that his words would not "carry." It must always be remembered, in writing for the stage, that a great deal must be allowed for the manner and expression of the actor. Three words written on a sheet of paper may signify little, but spoken in the right way by the right person they may convey a whole world.

This is the great reason why I think it is a mistake to allow managers to read the MS. of a play. A play is written to be acted. It is written for the voice ; it is written for any amount of right by-play, and it is not meant at all for the

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reader in the armchair. I have seen some MSS. prepared for managers, and the stage directions were tedious to a degree that I should have thought inconceivable had I not read them with my own eyes. Apparently the parts are written on the hypothesis that the players are mere marionettes. On the other hand, I must say, in defence of the author, that there is a kind of laziness now on the part of our actors. They are afraid to trust themselves for a second without a sentence. All English players dread a pause. Personally, I do not care how long a speech is so long as it seems to come spontaneously from the speaker. It is quite right to give certain characters long speeches, because in real life we meet people from time to time who have a real gift for describing their feelings and thoughts at every turn. If one can think of such a person and make him

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or her into a one-man or a one-woman part, one may be congratulated.

There is nothing to be said against rhetoric on principle. We have all met born rhetoricians, just as there are born sentimentalists, but the best rhetoric ever written loses its point unless it is plentifully punctuated by pauses. Often a speech which is not in itself outrageous, is made to seem so because the actor hurries through it as though he were speaking faster than he thought, and then we get what I may call again the comic note. Each utterance should seem to be the result of some experience; it should be connected with some earlier line of a scene in the play, or it should itself be leading up to some further development; the whole essence, in fact, of composition turns upon this. Wagner, in his operas, brought it out clearly as a system of motives. The actor, therefore, should convey the effect

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of some one who knows what he is talking about.

My plea is for naturalness, and any study of an emotional or of a philosophical *rôle* ought to be taken from life and not—as is now the case—from our little catalogue of tricks. It is the trickery which provokes indifference. Say, some one comes on looking very much like—well—an ordinary lover—I will not take an abnormal type. But, I ask you, does the leading juvenile behave like a lover or speak like one? The author may give him the most touching and charming things to say, but for some reason we find ourselves wondering why we are so singularly uninterested in the failure or success of the young man's suit. I remember taking a French friend with me to see a highly successful farcical comedy. He said at the end, "I know now what the British expression '*love-making*' means. It is

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something like a quadrille for two. The couple exchange seats, join hands at intervals, cross at intervals, and talk at the top of their voices the whole time." I then took him to a work of a less frivolous character, but he pretended to discover the same characteristics pitched in a more solemn key, and, to him, the gravity of the superior lovers was even funnier than the irresponsibility of the lighter pair.

Now, as an author, my sympathies are naturally with my own profession. I am fully alive to the difficulties of the playwright. If he decides to be serious, he is expected to be more serious than life itself. He has to conceal his humour, that decent gaiety which underlies existence always. And I maintain that if you do not give that decent gaiety in the dialogue or the demeanour of the players, you will get a scornful gaiety in the audience. The common sense of

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humanity—perhaps I should say, the common wisdom of the pit—will assert itself.

A great change has been coming over the public in its attitude towards humour, towards sentiment, and towards all abstract ideas. In that striking work, *The Flood Tide*, which was, to me, one of the most remarkable signs of the times, Mr. Cecil Raleigh hit off with admirable daring the precise feeling which now exists with regard to the old traditions of moral and other conduct on the stage. I say other conduct deliberately, because there are so many shades of opinion on the subject of conduct which was formerly described as immoral—again, I must remind you that I am speaking of *stage* morals. In Mr. Raleigh's play no one behaved particularly well, some behaved badly, most were shameless, and all were frank. As a result, the audience knew

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where they were. The old sham stuff was being discarded and laughed at, and they were asked to join in the general relief.

In a recent production, of the two lines which bring down the house, one could not have been said on the English stage at all two years ago, and the other would have been permitted to the heroine only if she had been an adventuress. It will be interesting to watch further developments on this line of the least resistance. I think it would be a pity if we became, as a nation, flippant. It does not suit us, because it is only an outward flippancy. It is not in the race to take things, which we have been taught to regard as sacred, lightly, but the evident rebellion against utterly false conventions of which I have already spoken, is a sign of great health and vigour in the present generation. It will no longer stand

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nonsense; and I have not seen a genuine success in any department of art which has not had a great deal to recommend it on one score or another—either the spectacle, or the stage management, or the ability of the company, or the merit of the author's work has commanded support.

Mr. Tree's last production, *The Darling of the Gods*, is a triumph of the scene-painter's and the stage-manager's art, and the melodrama—to use a colloquial expression—gets along! Mr. Belasco has thought out a very peculiar art of his own, for which I anticipate some possibly great improvements. It will show you how unselfish I am in the matter when I add that I think the author will not figure to any large extent in the scheme. Mr. Belasco has mastered the secret of giving vitality—I do not mean atmosphere, I mean *vitality*—to a stage picture. That is to say, his scenes are

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alive, and they are so alive that the greatest vivacity is demanded from the actor who appears in them, in order to compete with the natural forces as understood by the eminent American manager. The vivacity of the sky, for instance, is almost unparalleled, and light no sooner goes out in one corner than it peeps out in another. The very earth opens and shuts, and there is apparently not an inch of canvas in his theatre which does not "palpitate," as the reviewers say, "with actuality!" But it is all so admirably carried out and so pleasing to the eye that, quite honestly, one wishes as little said as possible. An author who wished to keep pace with ingenuity of this kind must condense his meaning and must be simple, because it is not a dumb show, and it is not pantomime. I think Mr. Belasco is on the right track in the simplification of his subject matter. I should like to see his method applied

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to a piece dealing with modern life and familiar scenes. His presentment of *Zaza* followed the French original closely, and it cannot be regarded as an English or American production at all.

I have the most sincere admiration for the work of our chief dramatic authors, but is there one of whom we can say, as the greatest French critic of the last century said of Béranger, that he expressed the soul of France as a race and as a nation? His good sense as a man kept him from insincerity as a poet. We all know the dangers of the poetical temperament in the direction of sentimentality. Have we a serious writer who expresses, in dramatic form, the soul and the life of the English people? Yet how can that soul be expressed while managers persist in the view that the public—and that means the English people—are densely stupid, vulgar, and unimagin-

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ative. The view is foolish, and its foolishness is proved by the fact that, in America and in England, clap-trap is no longer tolerated by those who pay for their seats. When I see a full house applauding balderdash, I wonder how many of the enraptured have bought their tickets with hard-earned money. So far our strictly national theatrical art is found in Gaiety comedy and Drury Lane melodrama—these things are racy, thoroughly English and representative. There is nothing in the least resembling them elsewhere. The dialogue in Drury Lane melodrama is lifelike—there may be violence in the situations, but the talk is at least human speech as we often hear it. As for Gaiety comedy and comedy at Daly's, I am never weary of praising them, and, as a national entertainment of a light class they stand on the highest plane in the world. There is nothing comparable to these productions in

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Berlin, Paris, Munich, St. Petersburg, or in the East, and the reason is because it has not yet been sterilised, cramped, and ruined by traditions. It is a growing art. It is now at a very high point of prosperity, and it may begin to decline under the stress of a change in the popular mind, changes which occur in every department with almost mathematical precision. But when we turn to the drama proper, we find writers and players alike bound down by the fantastic notions of what will or what will not carry across the footlights.

I maintain that sincerity will carry anywhere, and that the curled little finger must inevitably fail. If I wished to condense my view of the present situation in England of theatrical affairs, I should say, with the eminent surgeon I have quoted, that all the little fingers were curled. The conventions have grown into affectations, and, until they

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are thrown aside, we shall have titterings in the auditorium and bitter complaints among authors, and bitterer scenes among that lonesome and mysterious race known as "the backers."

Traditions, I admit, are useful, and they ought to be respected, but the two points in regarding any tradition of the stage are these:—In the first place, how shall it be understood, and, in the second place, how far shall it be maintained? Many traditions which suited the popular education twenty, or ten, or even five years ago, are really out of the question to-day. We may describe popular opinion as being in a transition stage on most subjects, and experiments must be tried. I do not recommend experiments in the way of dolorous and ignoble studies of humanity, but I do wish to urge experiments in the direction of greater naturalness in the written dialogue, and greater simplicity in the actor's business. There

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are two ways of being simple : one can be true to life or true to art. Sometimes it is possible to be true to both, and then we get the triumph of an actor or of an author, but such triumphs occur but seldóm in the course of a whole century. We will not soar toward such ambitions. But I am speaking now of the good, workable, straightforward play about people as they are, or, if we are inclined to romance, people as they would wish to be if all things were equal. These can, at least, be true to life. Let us give Art a rest for a little. I think Art can take care of herself. I have always thought so. She never came to any one for the asking, and in all her ways she is as capricious as Fortune. In this attention to life and the observation of humanity, as opposed to the study of defunct canons of stage craft, and obsolete sham heroics, I see all the hope for the British drama.

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My entreaty, then, is not to write plays in imitation of other plays, and not to compare plays with other plays, but to test each separate play and every performance by the truths of life and experience.



**On Atmosphere
and Character**

ON ATMOSPHERE AND CHARACTER

A FEW theatrical critics, and nearly all the literary critics of the first and second rank, write a great deal about the "atmosphere" of every play, or book, which may be said to come in any way under professional consideration. The point to be decided is:—"Whether the characters form an integral part of their surroundings." What does this mean? I have studied the point ever since I was sixteen—when I first began to take an interest in criticism. Until that age I read all I could find for the mere pleasure of reading: Shakespeare, Defoe, Swift,

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Captain Marryat, Judge Hughes, Fielding, Thackeray, Dickens, Dante, George Eliot, Dumas, Sir Walter Besant, William Black, Ouida, Milton, Trollope, Rita, Victor Hugo, Florence Marryat, Harrison Ainsworth, Goldsmith, Charlotte Brontë, Swinburne, Rhoda Broughton, Thomas Hardy, Sheridan, W. S. Gilbert, Henry J. Byron, Sir Francis Burnand, T. W. Robertson, Tom Taylor, Mrs. Forester. I had read without method all the works—many of them many times over—of all these authors before I was seventeen and before I had read even one classic essay in criticism. Balzac and George Meredith I could not read until I was twenty—as a girl I could understand neither; Richardson the sentimentalist always seemed to me deadly, and I have never yet cared in the least for Clarissa, or Pamela, or their lovers; I did not appreciate Homer and the Greek dramatists until I was twenty-three; nor Sir Walter

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Scott, Jane Austen, and Tolstoi till I was twenty-six. I mention these facts precisely because they are really curious. It is odd, for instance, that one should be able to take keen pleasure at twelve in Dante and at the same age find nothing at all in Homer the poet—whom I now place first of all. It may be due to the fact that Dante was dealing with Christian doctrines—with which all Catholic and Protestant children are familiar—whereas I knew nothing then about Pagans and Paganism, and the superb myth of the gods conveyed nothing to my mind. Hell, with its undying tortures, seemed perfectly normal and right ; but Olympia, with its humours and thunderbolts, seemed to me preposterous, wicked, of course, and uninteresting. On the other hand, it is easier to see that the subtleties and detail in Balzac, George Meredith, and Flaubert would tax a mind accustomed only to the direct narrative

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and dialogues of Fielding, Thackeray, Trollope, and Thomas Hardy. Sir Walter Scott, I admit, is not subtle, and I am not able to explain the indifference I felt during my early youth toward his genius. I had cousins who loved him, but I did not. "Kenilworth" and "Ivanhoe" were to me dreary and artificial—and this was not because I disliked historical novels, for I read Dumas from morning till night and the whole of Harrison Ainsworth at least once. I had also read Gibbon, Macaulay, and Froude with eagerness before I was seventeen. Harrison Ainsworth belongs rather to the period of my childhood—that is to say, before I was twelve—and I have never read a line of his since. Dumas will always delight me, and, in my opinion, Froude's portraits of Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, and Mary Tudor are the finest in literature. It will be seen, therefore, that an increased experience of

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life gained between the ages of sixteen and twenty enabled me to read with better knowledge; and a systematised point of view taught me to read with more fastidiousness. Hume, John Stuart Mill, Spencer, Locke, Berkeley, and Thomas Hobbes I had criticised before I was twenty. I was twenty-two before I was "let loose" in Aristotle and Plato—the latter, with a host of German and other metaphysic, killed all my interest in fiction for some time. I should still keep the greater number of the names of my first list in any list which I might now draw up. It would be ungracious to find fault now with any one of the authors whose works gave me so much happiness and in all but equal proportion to those of the great masters.

This truth brings me back to my starting point—namely, the question of "atmosphere." I am certain that, so far as I myself am concerned, the writers

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who have conveyed to me what we all usually understand by "atmosphere" were Defoe, Marryat, Dante, Thomas Hardy, and Balzac. In all the other writers, without exception, I have little or no recollection of the scenes or scenery, the houses, the rooms or the streets: the characters alone stand out with imperishable distinctness; but in the case of Balzac, his descriptions of places, streets, furniture and the like are to me more vivid than any of his characters as they appear outwardly. It was his method to give vitality to the inanimate, shells to his human beings—yet within each shell a most extraordinary revelation of some unique human soul. I would compare his creations, therefore, with those Chinese lanterns of strange shape which have nevertheless a real light burning within them. I know Balzac's souls: I have never met any of his people. Yet if I visit a French town, whether old and

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a little forgotten or old and modernised, I seem to know it, through Balzac, by heart. Thomas Hardy, similarly, gives this amazing vitality to what we must still continue to call "atmosphere." His characters, also, in comparison with their surroundings, live, but with a kind of abnormal life. Perhaps it is part of his philosophy that the scene endures and the players perish. When his people die, they die indeed ; and even if they do not die within the measure of the story, we know that they will die utterly. By intention, he designs them as mere atoms against the everlasting hills. But I have seen "Bathsheba Everdene" : I have never seen "La Cousine Bette." I know them both. Balzac gives a dreadful, or a sweet, permanency to the individual spirit. The shell, or the lantern, can be thrown off at any moment, but the spirits he has evoked go on and on as eternally as the damned and the blessed in Dante.

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The "atmosphere" in Homer is treated on such broad universal lines that the very word "atmosphere," which is modern and connotes something local and peculiar, is wrong when applied at all to the background and climate of the Iliad or the Odyssey. Homer's sea is all the seas: his Ithaca is every man's Ithaca: we cannot think of it as we do, for instance, of the house of the Grandets, or the province from which Lucien de Rubempré started forth to conquer Paris.

It would be very interesting to dwell at length on this topic: I may return to it some day. In the meantime, it is not unsafe to say roughly that no author has yet been able to give with equal force what are called the surroundings and what are called the characters. Cervantes has been quoted as the one man who has succeeded in this achievement, but those who know "Don Quixote" well would

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not maintain for an instant that the personages in that great and noble composition are anything but essentially romantic. The atmosphere, on the other hand, is—so long as Spain endures—realistic and local. It is not the atmosphere of any other country in the world.

**Billy Booth and
his Amelia**

BILLY BOOTH AND HIS AMELIA

THE epics of *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* ought to be given to every girl on her eighteenth birthday. Many would find these works coarse, deficient in romance and fine sentiments, dull here and there, and prosaic from beginning to end. Nevertheless, carefully read and taken to heart, they would save women from innumerable mistakes and tears. Tom Jones and Billy Booth are not heroes, not philosophers, not men of intellectual tastes or intellectual professions, but they are men ; they spring from a sound stock,

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and, while they bear no sort of resemblance to the ultra-virile bully of costume plays and fiction, they are certainly robust animals who take little interest in the soul. Amelia often fears that her Billy is an atheist—"a consideration which did not diminish her affection for him, although it gave her great uneasiness." We are first, and properly, introduced to him in circumstances as little pleasing as they well can be; but we are made to feel at once, by the ingenious play of the narrative, that he is strong in body, weak in will, warm-hearted, quick-tempered, no fool, yet a duffer. He adores Amelia, but he cannot resist the flattery of Miss Matthews. Odysseus with Calypso was not more devoted to the absent Penelope than is Billy, at supper with Miss Matthews, to his dear Amelia at home. It is not hard to understand Booth's love for Amelia—every man she meets falls in love with

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her. But why should Amelia so idolise Booth? He is not always sober, he is constantly in debt, his imprudence knows no limits, his jealousy is insane, he has no brilliant gifts in conversation, and he is susceptible, to say the least, to the attractions of every good-looking woman he meets. What, then, are Billy's charms? He has a fine figure, he is handsome, and he is affectionate. When Amelia has a cold he sits by her side and refuses to leave her; when she is seriously ill he suffers more than she. He thinks she is perfection, and he praises incessantly her beauty, her character, her children, and her sense. In other words, he has the art of making Amelia feel that she is appreciated. There is a fine touch toward the end of the epic, when Billy confesses an infidelity which he had not the courage, for months, to acknowledge.

"I cannot now forgive you," she

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answers after a short silence; "and my reason is—because I have forgiven it long ago." She had received an anonymous letter on the subject.

Now there are many despotic wives who might regard Amelia as a fool. In the supposed injury to their own self-importance and vanity they would have quarrelled spitefully with Booth and lost, perhaps, their influence over him for ever. But Amelia, having considered the circumstances, which were peculiar, and relying on her knowledge of Billy's generous disposition, saw that his own remorse was in itself punishment enough for the fault.

It is not my intention to give any account of Fielding's great novel; I want to draw attention only to its wisdom and usefulness, and contrast it with many well-written foreign and English novels of the present day, which, so far from being either wise

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or useful, add industriously to the unhappiness of young girls and women. I say girls and women because men are not led away by misrepresentations of domestic life and social facts; they have, to begin with, every opportunity afforded them of learning the truth, and, just as they are more direct in all their actions than women, they are clearer in their thoughts—when they have them. But the average man is not thoughtful; he is as little thoughtful as Jones and Booth; he feels, and that is enough for him. It is seldom enough for the average modern women. She broods over her emotions, cherishes them, enjoys them, and, far too often, stimulates them artificially by feeding them on unwholesome literature. Much so-called goody-goody literature is quite poisonous, and many respectable tales are shocking because of their imbecility. A book may be unwholesome on account

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of its sickliness, and this is the peculiar fault of many works which are regarded, by parents, as safe. They are not safe; their flimsy pictures of love and marriage enervate the mind, and, where it should be prepared to encounter bravely the adversities of life and its disappointments, it is soon made unfit for everything except falsehoods, discontent, and chagrin. Fielding is not an idealist—idealism is not for the majority—but he is a moralist who, by his very moderation, produces a sounder impression, and preaches a better lesson than can ever be achieved by exaggerated statements on behalf of the angels, or against them. What sane person would not sooner read in two lines that Amelia could make a good mutton broth than be given twenty pages describing a *detraquée* in the spasms of morbid jealousy? Who would not sooner be told how she

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pawned her best chemises and her trinkets to pay for Booth's gambling debts than be given a long unreal account of her obtaining, in a sweet conversation and a tea-gown, several thousand pounds from a Platonic admirer? The pawnshop exists; the millionaire Platonic admirer is yet to be found. And who, in his senses, would not rather believe that the beautiful young creature often lost her looks and became weary with anxieties than be bolstered up by false descriptions of the exquisite poetical effects of care, illness, and hard work on the eyes and complexion? These things have but one effect, and it is destroying. Amelia's looks come back, and all ends well; "She is the finest woman of her age in England," says the author. Booth himself thinks "she is as handsome as ever." Having heard so much truth from Fielding, one does not quarrel with this

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reassuring conclusion: "Nothing can equal the serenity of Billy and Amelia's lives."

One must go back to Homer for such storms and such a coming into port.



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